

Assistance in Building Afghanistan by Developing Enterprises

Final Performance Report
October 16, 2012 – July 15, 2018

Submitted: July 14, 2018



USAID
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ABADE
ASSISTANCE IN BUILDING AFGHANISTAN BY DEVELOPING ENTERPRISES



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Prepared under Leader-with-Associate Cooperative Agreement No. EEM-A-00-04-00002-00,
Associate Cooperative Agreement No. AID-306-LA-13-00001
USAID Afghanistan ABADA Program

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ABADE:	Assistance in Building Afghanistan by Developing Enterprises	TAMIS:	Technical, Administrative and Management Information System
ACD:	Afghanistan Customs Department	USAID:	United States Agency for International Development
AISA:	Afghanistan Investment Support Agency	VEGA:	Volunteers for Economic Growth Alliance
ASMED:	Afghanistan Small and Medium Enterprise Development		
BDS	business development services		
CLC:	cellular lightweight concrete		
CAD	computer-aided design		
ERF:	Environmental Review Form		
ERR:	Environmental Review Report		
ICT:	information and communications technology		
IEE:	Initial Environmental Examination		
IESC:	International Executive Service Corps		
LOP:	life of project		
M&E:	monitoring and evaluation		
MoCI:	Ministry of Commerce and Industries		
MoF:	Ministry of Finance		
MoMP:	Ministry of Mines and Petroleum		
MoWA:	Ministry of Women’s Affairs		
NGO:	non-governmental organization		
PPA:	public–private alliance		
RFA	request for applications		
SCEB:	stabilized compressed earth brick		
SME:	small and medium enterprise		

Executive Summary of the Accomplishments and Results Achieved

The Assistance in Building Afghanistan by Developing Enterprises (ABADE) Program worked with the private sector in Afghanistan to **strengthen its productivity, increase domestic and foreign investment in the country, stimulate employment, and improve the business enabling environment**. ABADE’s public-private alliances (PPAs) with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) helped to reduce the risks involved in business expansion by procuring updated equipment, providing technical assistance and training, and requiring partners to invest a substantial percentage of the total partnership funds in order to guarantee commitment and improve the potential for sustainable success.

“We thank the people of the United States for implementing such projects in our country and hope their assistance will continue in the future. If there are more such factories, the raw materials, such as cotton and wool, now being exported to Pakistan for processing, will be processed in the country.”

— Menhajuddin Jalili, president of Abdul Saboor Alkozay Textile Factory in Jalalabad

ABADE achieved life-of-project (LOP) targets against all indicators and exceeded 12 of the 13, making a substantial impact on 518 SMEs in Afghanistan—104 percent of its goal to assist 500 SMEs during the course of the project.

ABADE had a robust SME outreach approach and very detailed PPA implementation process, both of which contributed to program success. With early outreach, including informational sessions in provinces throughout the country, and support such as application assistance, ABADE received 1,347 concept notes. From these applications, ABADE implemented 298 alliances with well-qualified enterprises: 270 SME alliances and 28 innovation alliances. The program’s commitment and adherence to a strict implementation process was crucial to the success of the alliances. With a comprehensive support package of equipment procurement, technical assistance, and training in bookkeeping, food safety, and marketing, ABADE alliance partners created a staggering 17,777 full-time equivalent jobs, exceeding the target by 19 percent. In addition, 268 firms improved their management practices as a result of the program, a 179 percent achievement of the target.

ABADE was very cost-effective and leveraged significant private investment. For every dollar of USAID assistance, \$5.98 was invested by alliance partners, with more than \$292 million invested in the Afghan economy, \$250 million in partner funds and more than \$41 million in USAID funds.

These investments, paired with technical assistance, helped to spur a 245 percent increase in sales at ABADE's PPA partner firms, which is 1,225 percent of the LOP target. The boost in sales was the direct result of increases in production and the product expansion facilitated by new and/or upgraded equipment (and critical training on that equipment) received as part of the partnerships. Through the complementary training in sound bookkeeping practices, marketing, and general business skills, ABADE alliance partners are better able to track inventory, develop business and marketing plans, and identify and address workforce skill gaps to improve their potential for sustainable growth and success.

To address the needs and concerns of Afghan women entrepreneurs and employees, ABADE provided training in high value skills and developed alternative workplace models for women. In total, 274 women received training in information and communication technology, diagnostic imaging, computer-aided design, materials testing, and QuickBooks software and accounting, achieving 137 percent of the program's target. Alternative workplace models, among them home-based employment, work-site child care options, and women-only offices and production areas, were put in place within 61 alliance partners, a 153 percent achievement of target.



Ms. Halima Mosavoi tests the structural strength of construction materials during a laboratory activity as part of materials testing training.

In addition to forming PPAs and delivering technical assistance and training for alliance partners, ABADE addressed six specific industry constraints facing enterprises in Afghanistan's complicated business environment, with a special focus on addressing constraints for women and youth entering the workforce and supporting women-owned enterprises. These six action plans were developed to identify and address constraints to starting and/or sustaining a business, looking at six key sectors: carpets, construction materials,

gemstones and jewelry, women's SMEs, agribusiness, and marble mining and processing. With six constraints addressed by program completion, achieving 150 percent of the LOP target, ABADE provided the Afghan government, partners, and stakeholders with a detailed roadmap to continue improving its most crucial and profitable sectors.

One important constraint that was successfully addressed by ABADE is the exorbitant transportation cost faced by Afghan carpet producers looking to export their goods to a wider market. In cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Turkish Airlines, ABADE successfully negotiated a drastically reduced airfreight rate to Europe and the United States. The ministry signed the memorandum of understanding in 2016. This reduction in cost will help to

sustain the growth of the lucrative carpet industry in Afghanistan, creating jobs and expanding the reach of quality Afghan exports.

By providing Afghan SMEs with the opportunity to procure better equipment and improved technologies, by addressing skill gaps with industry-specific training programs, and by supporting innovative enterprises that are changing the landscape of business in Afghanistan, ABADE has benefited 4,914,616 beneficiaries throughout the country, achieving 6,143 percent of the target of 80,000 beneficiaries.

Although enterprises in Afghanistan face a complicated business environment ahead, marked by issues in security, transportation, and government policy, programs such as ABADE ensure that locally-owned companies continue to build on their experience, fortitude, and well-earned success.

Video Spotlight

The Faces of ABADE



(click images to view video)

AsiaPharma, Manufacturer of Syringe and Medical Equipment Company



Overall Description

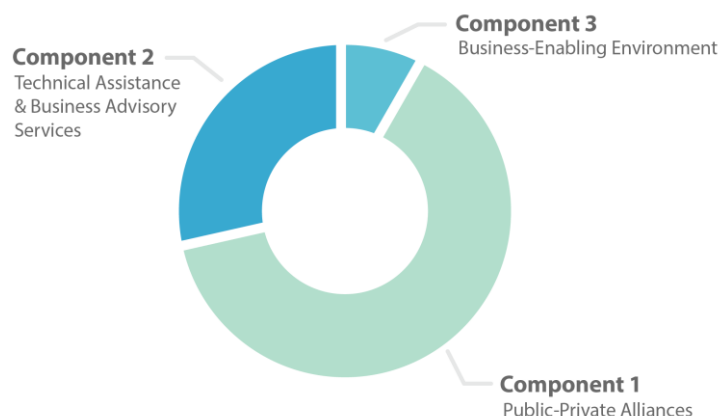
Beginning on October 16, 2012, the International Executive Service Corps (IESC) began implementing the Assistance in Building Afghanistan by Developing Enterprises (ABADE) program under the Volunteers for Economic Growth Alliance (VEGA) Leader-with-Associate Cooperative Agreement No. EEM-A-00-04-00002-00, Associate Cooperative Agreement No. AID-306-LA-13-00001. The project was originally scheduled to close on October 16, 2016 but received multiple no-cost extensions and was completed on July 15, 2018, which allowed the project to implement and close out additional public-private alliances. This final report covers the entire agreement period. IESC was the lead implementer of the ABADE program, joined by Land O’Lakes International Development and DAI. Under this agreement, VEGA and IESC supported USAID’s Development Objective 4: “A developed business climate that enables private investment, job creation, and financial independence by helping small and medium enterprises (SMEs) grow their businesses.”

Less than three months after the program was awarded, IESC had mobilized and was ready to begin program operations. The three technical components were staffed and fully functional as of February 2013 and the regional offices were set up by May of that year. Adopting best practices from the earlier Afghanistan Small and Medium Enterprise Development program, IESC was able to quickly launch ABADE technical activities.

Approach

The ABADE program was organized into three components (Figure 1): to develop and implement public-private alliances (PPAs), provide technical assistance and training, and improve the business enabling environment in Afghanistan. ABADE placed special emphasis on addressing constraints for women and youth entering the workforce and in supporting women-owned enterprises.

Figure 1 - ABADE Program Components



Through its three components, ABADE focused on four main activities:

- **SME alliances:** Under these PPAs, capital was provided to existing SMEs or business alliances through a competitive application process. The Afghan business partners were required to invest at least twice the amount of USAID’s contribution to ensure commitment to the activity and improve the chances of sustainable success.
- **Innovation alliances:** To stimulate innovation, these PPAs provided capital for new business ideas through a competitive application process. The Afghan business partners were required to invest an amount at least equal to the USAID contribution (See Table 1 for a summary of the PPA portfolio).
- **Technical assistance and business advisory services:** ABADE provided technical assistance and business advisory services to SMEs, sub-award recipients and other key stakeholders in areas such as accounting, marketing, access to finance, meeting quality standards, environmental compliance, and use of specialized production machinery. Special focus was placed on women entrepreneurs and ABADE’s PPA partners.
- **Business enabling environment:** ABADE worked closely with the Afghan Ministry of Commerce and Industries (MoCI) to improve the business climate by identifying and addressing regulatory and procedural barriers that affect a private enterprise’s ability to compete. After working with private and public sector to create five-year, industry-specific action plans for the agribusiness, marble, gemstones and jewelry production, construction materials, carpets, and women-owned SMEs sectors, ABADE assisted stakeholders with the implementation of priority initiatives identified in the action plans.

Table 1 - ABADE PPA Portfolio

ABADE PPA Portfolio	Number of PPAs	ABADE Contribution	Partner Contribution	Total Investment
Overall results				
Total PPAs	298	\$41,840,322	\$250,208,215	\$292,048,537
USAID/PPA partner leverage ratio		1:5.98		
PPA category				
SME PPAs	270	\$33,407,371	\$211,995,164	\$245,402,535
Innovation PPAs	28	\$8,432,951	\$38,213,051	\$46,646,002

Component 1 Activities: Public-Private Alliances

1.1 Prepare and Launch Requests for Applications

At the beginning of implementation, the ABADE team developed a comprehensive PPA manual. The manual included instructions on the review process, creating a selection committee,

assessment procedures, and selection criteria and scoring values. ABADE developed two different requests for applications (RFAs) for both SME and innovation PPAs and released them beginning in December 2012 with dates staggered for the two types of PPAs in order to prevent confusion among applicants.

In the second quarter of year one, ABADE prepared and released a call for expressions of interest under “Creating Jobs and Opportunities for Women,” which helped to identify potential innovation alliance partners. It was distinguished from the innovation alliance in that it specifically targeted women-owned or -managed enterprises, which were often less structured or did not strictly meet the PPA criteria. ABADE continued to conduct direct outreach and communication to women entrepreneurs and business associations serving women in order to identify potential partners.

With lessons learned from the first six months of the program, the technical team reviewed the concept note and PPA process in July 2013 and revised the manual to reflect a streamlined alliance development process. RFAs under the improved process were released in October 2013, with subsequent rounds in October 2014 and 2015.

1.2 Implement Outreach Campaigns

In order to identify quality applicants from the business community across Afghanistan, ABADE went on the road, delivering presentations in Kabul, Herat, and Mazari Sharif throughout February and March of 2013. With assistance from Land O’ Lakes, ABADE held workshops to assist SMEs with preparing applications and concept notes. The writing workshops were particularly important for identifying qualified applicants and carefully guiding them through the application process, specifically where language and literacy issues were at play due to Afghanistan’s low literacy rate. The technical team conducted one-on-one idea development sessions, in person and over the phone, to help bring successful applications to completion.

1.3 Set Up Regional Offices to Assist in the Development and Implementation of PPAs in Herat, Mazari Sharif, and Jalalabad

In addition to operations in Kabul, ABADE established two regional offices to service businesses in the northern and western regions of the country. The offices in Herat and Mazari Sharif were opened in 2013 and 2014, respectively, along with a satellite office in Jalalabad. These offices developed and implemented PPAs in those areas and allowed the program to extend its reach across Afghanistan (See Table 2 for geographic distribution of PPAs).

Security in the region began to deteriorate significantly after U.S. Forces started their drawdown in 2013, putting a strain on ABADE activities in the provinces and causing delays in the delivery of equipment and training to areas outside of Kabul. Under these circumstances, having the regional offices made it possible for ABADE assistance to flow well beyond the capital, supporting important sectors such as agribusiness and marble production in cities and rural areas throughout the country.

Table 2 - PPAs by Province

Location of Business	Number of PPAs
Badghis	1
Baghlan	1
Balkh	60
Herat	66
Jawzjan	6
Kabul	104
Kandahar	3
Nangarhar	56
Samangan	1

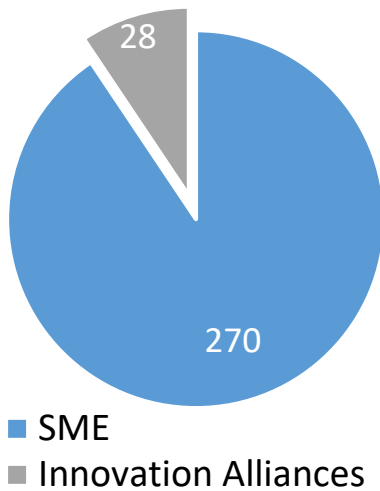
1.4 Develop and Implement SME and Innovation Alliance PPAs

The main focus of Component 1 was to implement the approved and signed PPAs, including both SME alliances and innovation alliances. The PPA process was thorough and intense and required working closely with alliance partners to identify and procure industry-specific equipment and address any technical and training assistance required to improve the business outcome for SMEs.

SME Alliances

To improve and develop its export capacity, Afghanistan must develop the infrastructure required to manufacture value-added goods from its raw materials. In industries such as marble, construction, and agriculture, local resources are being exported from the country only to be processed into value-added products and sold at increased prices, often right back to the Afghan market. Afghan businesses and workers rarely benefit from this relationship, but without access to the proper equipment or technical assistance, value-added manufacturing continues to be out of reach for many sectors in the country. ABADE identified SMEs that could benefit from updated value-added processing equipment and provided investment assistance to 270 SME alliances throughout Afghanistan (See Figure 2 for breakdown of alliances by classification).

Figure 2 - PPAs by Classification



One example is pomegranates. Afghanistan grows more varieties of pomegranates than any place in the world, including the large and especially juicy Kandahari pomegranate, but historically, much of the country’s fruit has been exported and processed into juice by foreign companies, leaving Afghan businesses and farmers cut out of the profits from value-added products.

Afghan Red Pomegranate opened in 2013 and managed annual sales of 20,000 tons of fresh pomegranates grown by local farmers. Without processing equipment, Afghan Red—and businesses like it—could only operate and employ their workers during the four to six months that the fruit was in season.

ABADE helped the Kandahar-based company to procure a plate-type pasteurizer and aseptic filling machine for processing and packaging pomegranate and other juices. In early 2016, the first juice began rolling off the production line at the rate of 10,000 to 15,000 liters per month. At full production, the firm could process three tons of pomegranates per hour. The 100 percent juice line became the first of its kind in Afghanistan and includes pomegranate, apple, and grape varieties, all sourced from Afghan fruit and therefore supports local farmers.

Since the partnership with ABADE, Afghan Red Pomegranate has experienced a staggering sales increase of 7,700 percent, and 47 new workers have been hired for year-round employment. As production ramps up to full volume, the business expects to hire an additional 70 employees.



Afghan Red Pomegranate employees conduct a quality assurance check on the 2016 crop of Kandahari pomegranates.

“This job offers me skills that are developing into new roles and the salary also helps me support my family.”

— Ismail Hotak, a new employee at Afghan Red Pomegranate

Another example is scrap steel. Afghanistan has historically exported its scrap steel for pennies on the dollar, only to have the steel return as rebar that is sold locally at exorbitant prices. Transporting the heavy steel bars across the border is not without challenges, including high transport costs and border and road closures that lead to shortages and delays in construction projects throughout the country.

With Kabul’s population climbing and the country experiencing ten significant earthquakes in the last fifteen years, the importance of new construction that is reinforced with rebar is crucial—the reinforcing bars act like a skeleton, allowing the concrete to flex and withstand more tension than it ordinarily could.

Kabul’s **Mahmoud Star Steel Mill** partnered with ABADE to purchase a rolling mill, furnace, and crane, putting 279 new employees to work turning scrap steel into high quality rebar. The partnership included the installation of an emission control system to protect workers from gases emitted during production. Sales have increased by 3,190 percent and the project has begun to reduce Afghanistan’s dependence on imported rebar for local construction projects.

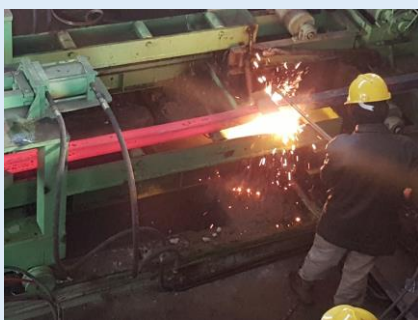
In most of the SME alliances, ABADE provided first and foremost the necessary equipment to undertake the value-added production activity. The assistance was complemented by personal safety equipment, training in management skills, technology, and food safety where required. Due to the particular and varied requirements of each sector, identifying and procuring the appropriate equipment for each PPA required industry-specific knowledge. A pool of qualified consultants provided valuable assistance in identifying appropriate equipment for complicated production lines, a resource that many Afghan businesses would not have had access to otherwise.

PPA partners committed their existing resources to the business expansion project and were generally responsible for site preparation, hiring and training staff to operate the new equipment, and implementing upgrades to their facilities. ABADE conducted periodic monitoring to ensure deliverables were on track and that environmental compliance issues were being addressed, as set forth in the alliance agreement.

Over the course of ABADE, more than \$293 million was invested in the Afghan economy. The title for all acquired equipment was transferred to partners during the closeout procedure of each PPA. ABADE's implementation and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) teams continued to monitor firm operations and verify the use of the equipment for up to 90 days after closeout, providing the partner with ample time to ensure proper functioning of the equipment.

Along with monitoring job creation and sales at closed-out PPAs, ABADE continued to check on the status of equipment turned over to partners and provided referrals or information on equipment maintenance services providers on an as-needed basis.

Afghan Steel Mill Forges New Employment Opportunities in Kabul



Production is underway at Khan Engineering's iron foundry and steel mill.

Mohammad Ibrahim Waziri's parents fled Afghanistan during the Soviet-Afghan War, seeking a more peaceful life in Quetta, Pakistan. Despite the ongoing tensions in their homeland, the draw to return was strong, and the family moved back to Kabul in 1998 to start up an iron foundry and steel mill.

Khan Engineering produces manhole covers and agricultural irrigation products and provides repair and maintenance services for other factories in the region.

As the Civil War in Afghanistan raged on, Hajji Khan Waziri found it increasingly frustrating that local steel was being smuggled into Pakistan instead of melted down for use in rebuilding the country's infrastructure. Scrap steel can be melted and folded to produce reinforcing bar (rebar), an important part of building safe structures, particularly in a seismically active zone such as Afghanistan. Most of the country's rebar was being imported from neighboring countries, increasing the cost of construction projects due to rising transportation fees and reducing the opportunity to create jobs by manufacturing the products locally.

With the support of the ABADE program, Khan Engineering secured the equipment they needed to reduce waste and create local jobs.

"Prior to ABADE's assistance, we had many problems in terms of machinery. We had an outdated production line and a limited capacity," explains 29-year-old Mohammad Ibrahim Waziri, managing director at Khan. "Previously, one in ten of our steel bars were being wasted because of low quality, but [after ABADE's assistance] that number has decreased to almost one in thirty."

As a result of the increase in production and decrease in wasted steel, the business has tripled its staff, hiring an additional 170 new employees from the local area. Profits have increased a staggering 1,025 percent, from \$80,000 to \$900,000.

“When I see demand for our products in the market, people are happy from our products, our staff members are happy for working with us, that is when I feel relaxed, happy, and proud. My business changed my life a lot, now I build my own house everything I have in life now is from my business.”

— Aziza Mohamed, president of Muska Ball and Leather Production Company

Innovation Alliances

ABADE’s innovation alliances supported nontraditional businesses with capital to launch new business ideas and undertake innovation-focused activities. Through a competitive application process, ABADE sought investments that expanded the role of women and youth in business, promoted pro-poor growth, and increased value-added productivity in strategic industries. To encourage innovation, the Afghan investment requirement was lower than for SME alliances, in most cases an amount at least equal to ABADE’s contribution, but each was evaluated and determined on an individual basis, since these applications presented feasible innovative business ideas but did not always meet the strict criteria required of the majority of ABADE’s SME partners.

In several cases, ABADE’s innovation alliances addressed crucial gaps in medical testing and health care and have the potential to improve health access and outcomes for thousands of Afghans. Kabul-based **Arif Azim Logistic Services Company**, for example, recognized an opportunity to streamline and modernize access to medical testing in the country. The firm sought to establish Afghanistan’s first modern, robust, distributed pathology laboratory. In partnership with Star Imaging and Pathology, a widely respected laboratory services provider in India, Arif Azim contributed to the partnership a sperm quality analyzer, an erythrocyte sedimentation rate analyzer, laboratory equipment, equipment for new sample collection centers, generators, ambulances, and land and construction costs to the investment partnership. After ABADE contributed a variety of pathology lab equipment, Arif Azim opened ten collection centers in neighborhoods across Kabul, with each location staffed by three trained staff members. Samples are collected from patients and securely stored until they are picked up and transported to the main center for daily processing. Samples requiring more complex testing are shipped to India for further analysis by doctors and specialists.

The turnaround time for testing has been greatly reduced, and the company developed a standard framework for transferring results and medical records to medical providers, thus limiting the need to pay for repeat tests and reducing the financial burden of providing quality healthcare.

Arif Azim has hired 385 new employees from the local area and is creating a skills development center to continue training pathologists and laboratory technicians.

**Composting:
 A Squiggly New Adventure**



Composting beds at the Green Organic farm are ready for seeding with worms and organic waste.

Hakima Zolfaghari started **Green Organic** in May 2013. It is the first vermicomposting enterprise of its kind in Afghanistan.

To bring her dream to reality, Hakima presented her business plan to two USAID projects, IDEA/NEW and ABADE, both of which helped her get her business off the ground. IDEA/NEW assisted Hakima with the technical aspects of vermicomposting, helped her construct the composting beds, and taught her how to care for the worms.

At the same time, Hakima brought her business idea to ABADE, which found her idea to be innovative, sustainable, have the potential to scale, and provide economic opportunities for women. In return for a matching investment of capital, land, and manpower, ABADE provided material inputs and equipment to Green Organic. This included 400 kg of worm for composting, which were delivered to Green Organic in early November 2013. The farm has an area of 450 sqm, enough capacity to produce 100 tons of vermicompost a year.

“We have started operations,” Hakima said with enthusiasm and pride. “I hope this venture will be the start of a new industry in Afghanistan that will significantly reduce imports of chemical fertilizers while sustainably managing waste and providing women with a viable livelihood option.”

Once fully operational, the collection centers are expected to see 20,000 patients each month, with the potential to provide 240,000 Afghans a year with local access to testing that many previously had to travel abroad to receive.

More than 300,000 patients at 40 hospitals will benefit from the oxygen gas tanks produced and distributed by **Said Walid Agha Oxygen Gas Production Company** in Jalalabad. Afghanistan had relied solely on imported oxygen sold at high prices, due in part to soaring transportation costs associated with the heavy tanks. Due to high interest rates and short repayment periods from local lenders, the company had not been able to get the financing required to set up production.

Through the investment partnership with ABADE, this Afghanistan Investment Support Agency-registered business has begun producing oxygen gas through cryogenic distillation and providing a reliable local supply of pure oxygen for patient treatment. The company has hired 79 full-time employees that serve approximately 4,000 patients per month at 40 hospitals throughout the country.



Employees fill oxygen tanks for local hospitals at Said Walid Agha Oxygen Gas Production Company in Jalalabad.

786 Pharma in Kabul is working to provide Afghans a safe alternative to the flood of fake prescription medications being sold in the country's loosely-regulated pharmacies. Doctors prescribe the proper medications for sick patients, but fraudulent medication, untrained pharmacists, and unexpected side effects are putting many Afghans at risk.

Through the investment partnership with ABADE, 786 Pharma is determined to make high quality, authentic medications accessible to Afghans through a chain of pharmacies with trained pharmacists at the helm. The company has been able to harness their previous experience in the pharmaceutical industry to focus on quality assurance, setting up relationships with reputable international wholesalers that supply seven pharmacies, with 20 additional shops slated to open over the next few years. The ABADE partnership focused on creating employment opportunities for women, with the company hiring female employees for their main office as well as a female pharmacist for one of their stores.

Three of ABADE's innovation alliances addressed recycling and waste management issues, which are important concerns as the country continues to develop. With consumer waste piling up in and around Afghanistan's growing cities, entrepreneurial Afghans have begun opening recycling facilities in the region. With ABADE's assistance, Kabul's **Clean World Recycling Industrial Company** procured new equipment to begin recycling the multitude of scrap tires and plastic waste that litters Kabul's hillsides and streets. The new production line uses an environmentally sustainable process called pyrolysis to decompose scrap tires for use in making fuel and scrap steel. As of December 2016, Clean World was ready to begin production and expected to hire 92 full-time employees.

Female Pharmacist Prescribes Change in Afghanistan's Capital



Bibi Safia is not your average pharmacist. The realities of pursuing a career in pharmacy as a woman in Afghanistan are often times harsh and potentially dangerous. Much of Afghan society is against women working outside their homes and alongside men, and the effect on the family's reputation, as well as safety concerns for the woman herself, make it a viable option for only the most driven of women.

"At the beginning, my parents were telling me not to study pharmacy, because I wouldn't be able to work with men in a pharmacy. But after they saw my courage and me volunteering at a pharmacy, their confidence in me increased. They told me, 'You can continue your work,'" Safia explains while standing behind the counter at **786 Pharma** in Kabul.

The 22-year-old Kabul University graduate is not only paving the way for other female pharmacists but is helping support her husband while he completes his own degree in pharmacy. Safia feels that Afghan women lack role models for women in the workplace. "I think 50 percent of the women who want to become pharmacists cannot find someone to inspire them. Some of them have a lot of self-confidence, as I have, and don't care what people think about them. I believed my decision to become a pharmacist was right, so I pursued, and now work without any problem, while also wearing the hijab."

Assisting her fellow Afghans and contributing to her family's financial future has been a source of great pride for Safi. "Through my salary, I support my family and also pay the rent of my house and the university costs of my husband."

Safia hopes her 11-month-old daughter will consider a career in medicine when she grows up, and that the young mother will be able to pass along her belief that women are just as capable as men. "I don't see any difference between myself and male pharmacists. I feel very comfortable working with them and also don't think I am less than them."

Malika and Refa Environmental Solutions is a woman-owned enterprise, founded in 2013, that the Afghanistan National Environmental Protection Agency has approved to transport, compost, and recycle solid waste. The company was awarded a contract to remove the organic waste generated at Bagram Airfield in 2014.



Workers from Malika and Refa Environmental Solutions separate the recyclable portions of waste gathered from the Bagram Air Field.

Malika and Refa applied to the ABADE program to support their plan to turn organic waste into agricultural fertilizer for Afghan crops. With the potential to address Afghanistan's growing food waste and also support agricultural production, this innovation partnership was a win-win. ABADE assisted with procuring composting equipment and provided technical assistance to develop, test, and analyze composting recipes that would produce a high-quality and marketable fertilizer product. Malika and Refa has created more than 55 direct jobs since the ABADE

partnership, with half of those jobs being filled by women.

Component 2 Activities: Technical Assistance and Business Advisory Services

Technical assistance was a critical component of the ABADE program. From identifying the most appropriate equipment for the activities outlined in the investment alliances to training management and staff on the use of the equipment, targeted technical assistance contributed to the success of the enterprises supported. Assistance in the form of training played a significant role in improving the financial accounting and management practices of participating businesses. In addition, ABADE committed to providing women-focused training, with an emphasis on training in high-value skills.

Component 2 was divided into pre-award and post-award services. Pre-award services included technical assistance with business plan development, particularly focusing on financial reviews, marketing, and budgeting. Conducting a feasibility study or marketing assessment are examples of pre-award technical assistance.

Post-award services focused on industry-specific technical skills training and management and staff training to aid in the implementation of the PPA. Included in the PPA package was technical assistance to improve management practices and ensure the successful operation of new equipment, increasing the likelihood of success for the business. Environmental compliance was also an important part of post-award assistance.

2.1 Development of SME and Innovation Alliances

In August 2013, the ABADE Component 2 team began developing concept notes into full applications, in preparation for committee review. This function was transferred over from Component 1 after an internal review of procedures, to ensure a more efficient use of human resources in all components. Because both components had a role in PPA implementation activities, there was significant overlap between the two components.

In coordination with the Component 1 team, the Component 2 team continued to hold concept note writing workshops, and activity that proved extremely effective. The number of concept notes received rose from an average of three per week at the beginning of the project to almost 20 per week by the close of year one.

To identify potential alliance partners in underserved sectors, the ABADE team coordinated its outreach with key stakeholders: MoCI, Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA), Chambers of Commerce, industry groups and associations, women's business unions, private financial institutions, USAID implementing partners, and other development organizations.

In addition, ABADE targeted businesses geographically, focusing on those in the industrial zones of Kabul, Herat, Mazari Sharif, and Jalalabad (also where ABADE offices were located), and conducted outreach activities in the provinces of Jawzjan and Samangan.

2.2 Prepare Support Systems for Alliance Partners and Relevant Actors

ABADE used DAI's proprietary software, the Technical, Administrative and Management Information System (TAMIS) to track, manage, and report on PPAs. This robust system allowed the program to efficiently document and manage all procedures, steps towards implementation, decisions, approvals, and human resource activities. A capital investment form used for developing PPA budgets was integrated into TAMIS and helped improve equipment cost estimates and significantly shortened the time to develop each PPA. The efficiencies built into the TAMIS system increased the pace of PPS submitted to USAID for approval.

2.3 Develop Business Development Services Packages

Knowing the technical assistance that would be needed by the SMEs, ABADE created a nationwide map and inventory of available consulting services in Afghanistan to identify existing business development service (BDS) providers and profile their activities and experience. A local firm was contracted to design and implement a survey of these providers in year one and results were analyzed in year two. They surveyed 511 BDS

Computer Networking Training Benefits Afghan Women



In 2015, ABADE provided a computer networking training course for women interested in pursuing a career in this field. The training prepared students to complete the Cisco Certified Network Associate examination, certifying a technician's ability to install, set up, configure, troubleshoot and operate a medium-sized routed and switched computer network.

The 120 hours of training took place between August and October of 2015. A total of 19 women, all IT students and recent graduates, completed the course, 15 of whom successfully passed the mock CCNA exam and qualified for ABADE support in covering the costs of the official CCNA examination. In December 2015, 13 of the graduates took the online exam. Nine women passed and obtained the CCNA certificate, an internationally recognized proof of acquired knowledge and skill.

agencies, associations, cooperatives, and organizations, and 625 businesses. ABADE received responses from 10 entities and 165 companies, a response rate of 27 percent. The survey found that only 11 percent of the businesses had ever applied for a loan and less than 30 percent of firms had a bookkeeping system in place. 37 percent indicated that they needed training in proposal writing and in financial, marketing, and management skills.

providers and 226 SMEs, with a strong focus on the marble, gemstones, carpet, construction, and food processing sectors. The survey results informed ABADE's efforts to help BDS providers improve the quality of their services and identified training needs for SMEs that were not currently offered in Afghanistan.

ABADE conducted two workshops for BDS providers. The first, BDS Capacity Building, was held in March 2013 for 28 participants, and the second, establishing a BDS Company and Promoting BDS Services, was conducted in May 2013 for 82 participants. The workshops focused on developing the BDS providers' service capability and sensitivity to the market in order to promote their relevance and long-term sustainability.

2.4 Develop and Conduct Women-Focused Training

An important objective of Component 2 was to facilitate women's participation in the workforce, and in particular, their entering and advancing in non-traditional sectors by offering training in information technology, engineering, and finance.

Gender Baseline Survey

Completed in March of 2013, ABADE's Gender Baseline Survey sought to determine the status of women's entrepreneurship in Afghanistan, which would inform the development of alliances, especially innovation alliances, and identify technical assistance and training to help women entrepreneurs succeed. The survey was sent to 18

Gender Strategic Action Plan

From the Gender Baseline Survey, ABADE wrote the Gender Strategic Action Plan Afghanistan 2013. This living document was continually updated as practical information was collected throughout the course of the program. The document aided in ABADE’s approach to developing PPAs involving women-owned businesses and helped to identify and prioritize specific training courses for women in high value skills.

High Value Skills Training for Women in Afghanistan

Guided by the Gender Strategic Action Plan, the Component 2 team prepared a training package for women. The offerings were meant to address the gap between current skills and skills that help Afghan women improve their position in the workforce or start businesses. These training programs focused on high value skills, defined as technical skills that enable women to advance in nontraditional sectors trade skills that provides flexible work hours and work locations. The training included accounting and business systems, website development and graphic design, engineering, diagnostic imagery, computer networking, human resource management, and digital marketing.

A cornerstone of the high-value skills training was medical diagnostic imaging training, including CT, ultrasound, and mammography. In the first quarter of 2016, ABADE selected a training provider to establish a sustainable training program in diagnostic imagery that meets worldwide standards. First, six Afghan technicians, two in each discipline, were trained as master trainers in India at an organization accredited by the Joint Commission International. Upon their return to Afghanistan, the newly certified trainers piloted three training courses for technologists in Kabul, in CT, ultrasound, and mammography.

Table 4 – Technical Assistance/Training Activities in FY2016

Training Activity	Province	Start Date	End Date	Total Trainees	Males	Females	SMEs
Computer networking / Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA) training	Hirat	8/16/15	10/18/15	19	0	19	5
Double-entry accounting training	Hirat	10/26/15	11/1/15	29	24	5	28
Medical laboratory technician training	Kabul	11/7/15	12/30/15	24	0	24	8
Double-entry accounting	Hirat	10/1/16	24/1/16	24	16	8	24
Marketing and brand management	Jalalabad	13/3/16	20/3/16	25	24	1	24
Training of technologists in diagnostic imagery – CT	Kabul	10/4/16	17/5/16	12	2	10	0
Public relations and marketing	Kabul	29/5/16	6/6/16	16	15	1	16
Training of technologists in diagnostic imagery – ultrasound	Kabul	8/1/16	8/21/16	13	0	13	0
Training of technologists in diagnostic imagery – mammography	Kabul	7/31/16	8/13/16	12	0	12	0
TOTAL				174	81	93	105

The CT course, held in April and May 2016, comprised more than 120 hours of classroom instruction and practical examinations. Prior to the course, trainees were given an online, multiple-choice pre-assessment to establish baseline knowledge and in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the course. The course covered anatomy and structural identification, in

addition to a general understanding of CT and its use. A physician specialist was brought in for additional support on the anatomy training and added depth to the course material. After a week on anatomy, the remaining three weeks were a combination of classroom and practical training using two different CT machines. Due to high interest in the training, the 10 female participants were joined by two men. All 12 participants passed the final assessment developed by Apollo Medskills, an Indian organization accredited by the Joint Commission International.

The ultrasound and mammography courses were piloted in August 2016 and were equally successful, based on a similar evaluation procedure. The ultrasound training lasted three weeks, and the mammography training took two weeks. Both were a combination of classroom and practical training. Trainees in both courses were split into two smaller groups to facilitate practical training, as technician rooms in most hospitals and diagnostic facilities are too small to accommodate 12 people. The last day of training was reserved for the final assessment, which consisted of a written examination requiring the trainees to write out a complete patient protocol, and a practical part which required the trainees to use radiology workstations to identify and annotate findings based on an actual case. All 25 trainees, 13 in ultrasound and 12 in mammography, passed the courses.

Trainees scored an average of 84 percent on the mammography final compared to an average of 52 percent on the pre-assessment.

ABADE also conducted a medical laboratory technician course, prompted by a workforce assessment conducted by the USAID-funded Afghan Workforce Development Program, revealing shortage of trained medical technicians in the country. ABADE's training was based on the methodology and globally accepted curriculum presented in the World Health Organization's Manual for Good Laboratory Training, including Quality Laboratory Management. Each of the 24 female participants received 240 hours of instruction over 48 days. The course had 10 modules, each with theoretical and practical components. The modules were the following: lab safety and security, parasitology, bacteriology, hematology, serology, virology, biochemistry, urology, reagent preparation, and mathematics.

As with the CT and mammography courses, participants were given an exam at the start of the program and at the end of each module. The learning was exceptional, with trainees receiving an average grade on the entry exam of 30 percent and average of 95 percent on the exit exam, with 16 women scoring 98 percent or above.

All of the high value training courses for women ranged from 15 to 45 days and benefited a total of 274 women, achieving 137 percent of the LOP target.

Ultrasound Training for Women Benefits Patients



Dr. Hamasa Azimi performs an ultrasound test on a female patient (behind curtain) at Ariana Hospital.

A pediatrician by training, Dr. Hamasa Azimi had been seeking opportunities to broaden her technical expertise and grow her career. Her search led her to specialized ultrasound training in Kabul that gave her the skills she needed to land her dream job.

Dr. Azimi was one of 24 participants of the Basic Ultrasound Training arranged by ABADE in collaboration with Ariana Hospital. The training, which took place in 2015, was designed to help fill the need for trained medical technologists in Afghanistan. A study conducted by USAID's Afghanistan Workforce Development Project identified a tremendous opportunity to expand Afghanistan's medical capacity through professional development.

Dr. Azimi knew the training would make her a more attractive candidate for specialized positions in the medical field and give her the opportunity to work with women in her community.

"This was the kind of training I wanted. Ultrasound is a common diagnostic procedure for women but very few female doctors are qualified to do this. I didn't get this kind of training at school or in my previous work," Dr. Azimi said.

Seven graduates of the training, including Dr. Azimi, were immediately offered full-time positions as sonographers by Ariana Hospital. Dr. Azimi performs up to 30 ultrasound procedures a day on her female patients. "A lot of them tell me how grateful they are to have a female doctor examining them. They feel at ease discussing sensitive medical conditions with me," she said.

2.5 Provide Demand-Driven Training

To develop and deliver demand-driven training, ABADE worked closely with businesses to identify the skills they require from their workforce, thus improving the chance of success for both businesses and their employees. As ABADE developed and processed PPAs, the technical team identified training needs by thoroughly assessing the partner enterprises and observing their current processes.

ABADE recognized the need to support SMEs with improved business skills in order to sustain the growth experienced as a result of program assistance. The SME assessments revealed that the majority of PPA applicants were still using single-entry or cash-basis accounting, an insufficient method for keeping record of a company's financial standing and inventory. ABADE developed training manuals and workshops to address skill gaps to improve financial management, business management, marketing, and workforce development.

One of ABADE's most requested training courses—double-entry accounting—was held eleven times, assisting 275 participants in Herat, Mazari Sharif, and Jalalabad. Along with ABADE's popular QuickBooks software training courses, this training directly addressed the lack of formal accounting processes in many of Afghanistan's SMEs. The training was regularly requested by

Training Boots Efficiency and Employment Prospects



Masooma Rezai landed her first paid job through her new skills in QuickBooks.

After Masooma Rezai finished high school, she could not afford to further her studies, nor could she find a job that would help her to pay for university. So for two years, she worked as a volunteer at **Payame Noor**, a printing and publishing company in Kabul. Then, in February 2014, she was given the opportunity to attend an ABADE training course in QuickBooks accounting software for small businesses.

The QuickBooks training involved five days of classroom instruction and 15 days of hands-on applied learning at participants' workplace.

"I tried to learn as much as I could from the training and started setting up the accounting system at Payame Noor. Through constant practice, I mastered QuickBooks in a short time," Rezai said.

She started applying for jobs again, and was quickly hired by the Rasana Daily, a newspaper in Kabul. Rezai has done well at her new job and has been given expanded responsibilities.

"I now handle the financial recording and reporting using QuickBooks. My supervisor must have been pleased with my work because he recently gave me a citation for my performance.," she said.

Rezai continues to work part time with Payame Noor, in addition to her position at Rasana Daily. She is getting ready to attend university.

PPA partners and other SMEs who heard about the workshops from fellow ABADE partners or through social media channels and success stories. The skills learned in these programs not only assisted trainees at their current employers but also developed competitive, high-value skills for future positions.

Marketing, brand management, sales management, and public relations courses were also held in Herat, Nangarhar, Balkh, and Kabul and aimed to improve businesses' ability to attract new customers, retain existing customers, manage sales staff, and build and maintain a positive reputation for their products and services. Trainees especially appreciated the opportunity to develop a company marketing strategy under the guidance of the trainers and fellow participants.

In addition to addressing general business and accounting training needs, ABADE developed training programs to address skills gaps in MoCI's focus industry sectors: marble, gemstones, carpets, construction materials, and food processing. Enterprises outside of the focus industry sectors, including non-alliance partner SMEs could request industry-specific consultancy services and skills training, and ABADE engaged local service providers to develop and conduct the training programs, creating opportunities for trainers to continue to use the established lesson plans for future courses. A total of 1,215 participants took part in ABADE's business and industry-specific training courses.

The program also placed a strong emphasis on food safety training for food processing companies. For reasons of both public health and economic growth

(i.e. meeting international food safety standards to export food products), it is crucial that Afghanistan’s food processors develop and follow safe handling procedures. In collaboration with the Business Innovation Hub located at the American University of Afghanistan, ABADE laid the groundwork for the nascent food safety inspection industry by recruiting and training food safety trainers.

Of the 29 trainees who began the course, seven highly proficient Afghan youth, two of them women, successfully completed the food safety training program. Under the supervision of an international consultant, the graduates conducted training at numerous food manufacturing companies in Kabul, Mazari Sharif, Jalalabad, and Herat. ABADE addressed food safety practices with all food processing PPAs, and by training Afghans to provide subsequent training, the number of beneficiaries of the program are exponentially increased.

2.6 Develop Alternative Workplace Models for Women



Maliha Mesbah sits with three of the weavers that she oversees at the Kazimi Allah Dad Rug Production Company, a women-only carpet weaving facility in Afghanistan’s capital.

Social and cultural mores in Afghanistan often dictate that it is unacceptable for women to work outside the home or alongside men, with women who do so experiencing varying degrees of harassment and social stigma. Ideally, Afghan women would be able to work alongside men in every capacity, but working within current social constraints respects the local culture while also improving women’s economic status. The ABADE program worked with 61 SMEs to develop alternative workplace models, such as on-site childcare facilities, women-only offices and workspaces, and working from home. Working from home is becoming

increasingly socially acceptable in Afghanistan and allows women to continue to satisfy their childcare and social obligations while contributing to their and their family’s financial security.

Sahib Zaman Carpet Company in Kabul produces yarn from wool processed by women in a home-based employment model. The investment partnership generated more than 1,400 new jobs, 1,200 of which were filled by women.

Kazimi Allah Dad Rug Production Company in Kabul made a concerted effort to provide opportunities for women to work at home making carpets on small looms. With the support of the ABADE program, the company established a women-only carpet weaving facility with large looms, increasing the size of the carpets they could produce. The business hired a female manager, Kabul University student Maliha Mesbah, and designated an entire workshop as a

women-only. Since the new facility was established, 75 women have been hired by Kazimi and sales increased from \$35,000 to \$50,000 a month. Kazimi was able to provide employment for young women from conservative families who would not be permitted to work in a mixed-gender environment.

Parents and husbands are more likely to support their daughters and wives entering the workforce if they are employed in this type of workplace. The camaraderie that comes with working alongside other women provides a social opportunity that women at home with their families do not have. In Afghanistan, most girls are not educated beyond grade six. Many of the women who have been hired at Kazimi are using the money they earn to continue their education, creating the possibility for a brighter future for themselves and future generations of Afghan women.

2.7 Environmental Compliance

As Afghanistan continues to develop its manufacturing capabilities, it becomes increasingly important to put in place procedures that ensure workplace safety, minimize environmental impact, and ensure food safety and quality control for both locally consumed and exported products. These issues are critical when creating new production lines. Implementing proper procedures for handling wastewater and noxious fumes from a variety of manufacturing processes have long-term ramifications for the health of the country and its workforce. Addressing improvements in food safety and hygiene practices also have long-term benefits for consumers.

All-Women Media Team Helps to Refocus the Lens



The all-woman team at Pardaz includes a writer and narrator, videographer, lighting technician, set and costume designer, and a sound mixing technician.

When Ahmad Zia Roshandel saw the need for an all-woman team to cover stories about women in Mazari Sharif, the largest city in northern Afghanistan, he didn't imagine his own small media company could fill the gap. **Pardaz Advertisement and Media Services** was doing well, but Roshandel couldn't afford to double his workforce and resources.

With investment assistance from ABADE, Roshandel was able to purchase new cameras, sound, and lighting equipment, allowing the business to expand and hire five new women employees. Pardaz also refurbished a four-room studio to accommodate the new staff.

In this conservative city, the all-woman team at Pardaz interviews, photographs, and films female subjects and covers women-only events. Ghezal Jan Osmani is a new employee. "Pardaz paved the way for me to realize my professional goal of being a writer and photographer. It is fulfilling to be doing my dream job and be part of an all-women video production team."

With women in each of these key roles, Roshandel can take on new business. "I used to have a staff of six working in a small two-room studio. Now I have 12 workers who work in much bigger studios using modern equipment," he said. "I am able to accept more projects and produce a variety of video commercials and in-depth documentaries that center on women."



A pinecone, sustainably harvested from a remote Chilgoza forest in Eastern Afghanistan.

As part of an investment partnership with Kabul-based **Bozurg Afghan Nut Processing Company**, the ABADE program commissioned two professors from Kabul University to conduct surveys of Chilgoza pine forests and the communities that harvest the nuts. Conducted between December 2015 and June 2016, the surveys were hampered by security concerns, which made it very difficult for researchers to interact with isolated communities. However, students from the university mobilized their networks to conduct surveys of Chilgoza forests throughout Paktia, Paktika, and Khost and gather information about the traditional harvesting methods being used.

The Chilgoza Pine is a protected species of pine tree found in the remote areas of Eastern Afghanistan. The trees help to stabilize the rocky hillsides and provide a source of income to the tribes and villages in those areas. The trees produce a variety of pine nut that is higher in nutritional value than many on the market but are traditionally sold in raw form to Pakistan at pennies on the dollar because of a lack of processing facilities in Afghanistan. Pakistani companies then process the nuts and sell them—at a high price—as a product of Pakistan. None of that profit returns to Afghanistan. The PPA with Bozurg helped the enterprise purchase the equipment for a new production line to process the nuts in Afghanistan. The ABADE environmental compliance team recognized the need to address sustainable harvesting concerns in the project. Little research has been conducted on these rare pines, and traditional methods of harvesting cause damage to the trees and their ability to reproduce. Due to security and the remoteness of the region, it had not been previously possible to conduct further research or sustainability training.

Together with ABADE's environmental compliance consultants, the Kabul University team developed recommendations and a training manual for conservation and the sustainable harvesting of Chilgoza pine nuts. Over two days in May 2016, the team held The Afghanistan Chilgoza Pine Forests Sustainable Harvesting and Regeneration Training Conference in Kabul. The conference brought together forestry and agriculture students from universities in Khost, Paktia, and Kabul as well as NGOs and members of Afghanistan's Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock. Bozurg used the training manual to train people in the communities that are currently harvesting for the company, with agreements that the company would pay a higher price for the nuts than Pakistani exporters were offering, if the communities would agree to use sustainable harvesting techniques. Since the new techniques will reduce the number of damaged pine nuts, reduce damage to the trees, and improve profits for these remote areas, the communities have been very receptive, ensuring a healthy future for the Afghan economy and environment.

ABADE's partners were subject to strict environmental compliance requirements via an Initial Environmental Examination (IEE tracking number OAPA-12-May-Afg-0033) and IEE Amendment 1 (tracking number OAPA-13-Jan-Afg-0010). The ABADE Environmental Management Plan was adapted from the template provided in the IEE and includes instructions for use of the



Shair Malang Metalwork Services employees wearing personal protective equipment procured by ABADE.

Environmental Review Form (ERF), the supplement to the ERF for Natural Resources Activities, the Environmental Review Report (ERR) and the Environmental Mitigation and Monitoring Plan and Report.

ABADE's Environmental Compliance Team was composed of two environmental engineers who were stationed in Kabul and supported by an expatriate environmental consultant who worked in the country periodically and was also available for remote consultation. The regional offices in Herat and Mazari Sharif also had an engineer/environmental officer on hand to conduct environmental assessments and periodic monitoring for the provinces. Environmental assessments were conducted during the initial stages of the application process, involving a site survey, the ERF, and the ERR. Environmental monitoring by the environmental engineers took place during site visits throughout the implementation process, allowing the engineers to provide technical and engineering support as well as guidance and enforcement of mitigation measures. All findings and photo

documentation from site visits were recorded in an Environmental Mitigation and Monitoring Report that was then submitted to USAID upon completion of the mitigation measures.

Environment compliance affects almost every industry in Afghanistan, with unique issues and concerns raised for each one. For less complex projects, for example, procuring sewing machines for a small-scale tailor, monitoring may have required only one or two site visits over the course of several months, wherein the partner is observed using recommended personal protective equipment for site workers or maintaining satisfactory waste collection and staging procedures. For more complex projects, monitoring may have been conducted over a year or more and could include longer-term product testing, refining key operational processes or conducting research

Environmental Monitoring of a PPA



*Sediment cartridge filters (1 micron)
installed at the factory for fine filtration*

In Mazari Sharif, **Hamid Saadat Nonalcoholic Beverages and Mineral Water Production Company** sought to add additional bottled beverages to its product line and modernize production.

As part of its due diligence, ABADE ran two water tests. Both times, the water used for the company's product was contaminated, indicating that the groundwater source itself was contaminated and that the company's filtration system was not working properly.

ABADE also looked at the condition of the plant and facilities and recommended other upgrades: replacement of the ventilation system, repair or replacement of damaged doors and windows, replacement of the wellhead and filter, and improvements to the plant's layout to separate the production area from the general use area.

The company was thankful to receive expert advice on how to improve the condition of the plant and mitigate the impact of its operations on the environment. They implemented all recommendations.

faces its own unique constraints and barriers to the success of current enterprises and the creation of new businesses.

In collaboration with the MoCI, ABADE took a bottom-up approach to the action plans. ABADE opened a public-private dialogue by providing regular opportunities for stakeholders to meet with government decision makers at business roundtables, working group meetings, conferences, and other events. After reaching agreement on the action plan recommendations

and developing training materials relevant to the partner's activities. By project completion, ABADE had contributed to the construction of 41 septic tanks, 23 water recycling systems and five water/wastewater treatment systems, facilitated laboratory analysis of 19 potable water samples and delivered personal protective equipment to 264 partner enterprises.

Component 3 Activities: Business Enabling Environment

ABADE Component 3 focused on improving the business enabling environment for Afghan SMEs, identifying key impediments to business and commerce and working with stakeholders to remove legal, regulatory, and administrative barriers to business success. As business constraints in targeted industry sectors were identified, ABADE helped to mobilize stakeholder support to address these constraints.

3.1 Generate Action Plans to Address Constraints in Key Sectors

ABADE, with the assistance of implementation partner DAI, worked with MoCI and private sector stakeholders to create action plans in six priority sectors, including marble product production, carpet production, women's SMEs, gemstones and jewelry, construction materials production, and agribusiness. These sectors are primed for growth in Afghanistan, but each

and priority actions, ABADE focused on engaging industry stakeholders in continued, active efforts to work with relevant government ministries, donor programs, and other resource groups to implement the priority activities recommended in the plans. This involved working closely with the MoCI and other relevant Afghan government ministries—Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Mines and Petroleum (MoMP), and Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA)—to organize working groups and task forces with substantial participation by SME business leaders, business organizations, donor programs, and other resource groups.

In order to assist the MoCI’s efforts to implement the SME action plans, ABADE helped design and develop a web-based information system for communicating with stakeholders and reporting on the status of action plan implementation. ABADE engaged an international consultant to help the ministry develop updated content and a template for an MoCI newsletter to be distributed electronically to industry stakeholders. In addition, ABADE produced the initial site design and content for an SME



Sadaf Sard Marble Processing Industrial Co. employee prepares a slab of Afghan marble

web portal that serves, along with the newsletter, as a principal channel for communicating with industry stakeholders on the status of action plan implementation and the results that are being achieved. The web portal launched in 2014 and was handed over to the MoCI in 2016, with training and technical assistance provided by ABADE for the ministry’s maintenance of the platform.

Marble Industry Action Plan

A final version of the marble sector action plan was completed and submitted to the MoCI for their review in March 2014 and approved within a month. The action plan addressed a number of issues, including the establishment of training centers for skills training in cutting, polishing, and resource and waste management to improve the quality of Afghan marble for export. The action plan also addressed the need to improve the supply and reduce costs of electricity and water through government lobbying, improve transportation and logistics by renegotiating more favorable terms of existing bilateral transport agreements, and negotiating with freight forwarders and shipping companies to obtain more favorable rates. Since the lucrative market for Afghan marble lies in export, addressing transportation costs is a crucial constraint for the growth of the industry.

To directly address a lack of skills training in processing marble, ABADE provided two sets of training programs in 2016 to build skills in quarry operations and marble processing, specifically in cutting and polishing practices. Participants in the marble processing training were factory supervisors and workers who operate the machinery, and thus provided hands-on skills to those in direct contact with production. Training took place in a Kabul factory with 30 students per class, ensuring all students had sufficient practical experience with the equipment.

The two-week quarry training class was conducted at a Kabul quarry that the training provider planned to use for future training. Thirty participants were taken through the entire process of quarry operations by an experienced quarry engineer, focusing on the specific parts of the process that Afghan quarry companies struggle with, such as block trimming and handling.

Women's Small and Medium Enterprise Action Plan

In January 2014, ABADE engaged a three-person consultant team (two expatriates and one local national) to help the MoCI develop a new action plan to support the development of women-led SMEs. The priority issues addressed in the women's SME action plan included recommendations for supporting women in starting their own business, gaining access to financing and capital investments, and dealing with social constraints that currently affect women's SMEs in Afghanistan. The final version of the women's SME action plan, which incorporated findings and recommendations gathered from numerous business roundtables conducted with women-owned businesses and other stakeholders, was completed in March 2014, and was approved by MoCI within a week.

Some of the priority constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in starting and managing their businesses include difficulties in maintaining compliance with government requirements for business registration, renewing business registrations (including obtaining tax clearances), closing inactive businesses, and locating information about the different types of licenses offered by organizations in Afghanistan.

During year three, ABADE implemented a new activity specifically designed to provide information and training to women's SMEs to help them understand business registration requirements and meet compliance requirements. The activity involved a survey of women business owners to gather details of the specific challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in dealing with business registration requirements; the results of the survey were used to prepare informational and training materials that addressed these constraints.

The program developed a detailed Business Registration Guidebook and Business Registration Fact Sheet, printed in English, Dari, and Pashto, and held two sessions of a three-day training program for 45 women entrepreneurs, providing detailed instructions on the steps entrepreneurs need to take to comply with registration requirements for different types of enterprises. Train-the-trainer sessions were also conducted in Kabul, Mazari Sharif, and Herat for 30 business services providers, to ensure ongoing training and advisory services for women entrepreneurs.

Once the Business Registration Guidebook was approved by USAID, ABADE provided 200 copies of the Dari version and 30 copies of the English version to the MoCI SME Directorate for distribution to women's SMEs, specifically targeting the October 2015 Women's SME Sector Working Group Meeting.



Sahib Zaman Carpet Manufacturer Company's wool spinning project has created alternative workplaces for women workers who bring the portable spinning wheels to their homes.

Carpet Industry Action Plan

For centuries, Afghanistan has been recognized for the artistry and quality of its carpets. Decades of war and political instability have damaged the industry and cut Afghan producers off from international markets. Security problems over the past three decades have forced Afghan carpet dealers to rely on Pakistani companies to manage critical value chain functions, including finishing carpets, finding buyers, and selling and shipping carpets to overseas buyers. Although investments in cut and wash facilities in Afghanistan have somewhat reduced the need to finish carpets in Pakistan, Afghan companies

continue to face problems developing direct business relationships with overseas buyers and customers without relying on Pakistan's middlemen.

To enable the sale and shipment of carpets directly to international buyers, the ABADE program worked with participants in the carpet sector to conduct the Carpet Sector Market Access Initiative. This initiative was carried out over a seven-month period, from March through September 2015.

ABADE recruited an international carpet consultant and four carpet buyers from Europe and North America to help conduct training sessions and business meetings with 50 Afghan carpet traders in Kabul and Mazari Sharif. The training sessions enabled local carpet producers to get direct feedback on the marketability of their products, including guidance on buyer requirements for product designs, colors, sizes, prices, and delivery.

Buyer-seller meetings, which included a mini carpet expo at the conclusion of the activities in Kabul, provided opportunities for buyers and sellers to get to know each other and negotiate initial sales agreements. These meetings resulted in over \$25,000 in spot sales from the international traders and individual buyers as well as \$110,000 in confirmed orders and over \$500,000 in future orders. In June 2015, as part of the second phase of the market access activity, the ABADE team successfully negotiated an agreement with Turkish Airlines to provide reduced airfreight rates for direct shipments to the 265 destinations currently served by its cargo division. These new rates, which are as much as 50 percent lower than previous costs for

airfreight shipments, mark a significant step in overcoming one of the most important problems facing Afghan carpet exporters: the high cost of shipping carpets directly to overseas customers.

The third phase of the market access activity focused on assisting Afghan carpet exporters to establish new business partnerships with international buyers from Europe and North America. ABADE conducted a two-and-a-half day Afghanistan Carpet Expo in Dubai, September 11–13, 2015. This event brought together a group of 18 international carpet buyers from Europe and North America and 27 Afghan carpet exporters. Participants considered the show a highly successful networking event that resulted in immediate sales of approximately \$60,000 and future orders exceeding \$4 million.

Agribusiness Action Plan

Completed in September of 2016, the agribusiness action plan addressed the principal problems that continue to hinder the growth potential of Afghanistan’s agribusiness sector and also reviewed the status of previously identified action plan issues, examining which ones were resolved and which remain priority issues requiring immediate stakeholder attention.

The action plan aimed to coordinate the efforts and resources of agribusiness sector stakeholders, including Afghan government ministries/agencies, international development agency programs, business associations, and private sector entrepreneurs, to implement projects and initiatives to resolve the principal problems that are inhibiting the growth and expansion of the agribusiness sector in Afghanistan.

“Afghanistan has ample agribusiness opportunities, both in terms of raw and value-added processing of agricultural products. If utilized, these opportunities can help the government, the economy, as well as the people of Afghanistan, especially the farmers.”

— Mudasir Ahmad Durani, vice president of Kandahar-based Afghan Red Pomegranate.



An Afghanistan Red Gold Saffron Company employee packs saffron.

A primary constraint in agribusiness is the process of issuing licenses. One action plan recommendation was to focus on streamlining the licensing and regulatory process at the two separate agencies tasked with issuing licenses, AISA and MoCI. Both agencies issue separate investment and export/import trade licenses, causing a great deal of confusion and frustration for agribusinesses as they try to navigate the two agencies. The issue, affecting a variety of sectors in Afghanistan, was resolved in late 2016. Now all licensing is handled and issued under MoCI.

Construction Materials Action Plan

The construction sector has been one of the major growth areas in Afghanistan over the past decade, accounting for approximately

10 percent of the nation's GDP; however, concerns over the production and quality of construction materials have long-term implications for the safety of Afghanistan's citizens. Large international companies have often been the main contractors on Afghan construction projects, with little value trickling down to local sub-contractors. Moreover, two-thirds of the construction materials used in Afghanistan, which typically account for around 35-45 percent of the cost of construction projects, is imported into the country from Pakistan, Russia, China, and the UAE.

The Construction Materials Action Plan identified a number of industry segments and products with strong current demand and growth potential. The best prospects for increasing local production and import substitution of construction materials are for products that can be manufactured locally using available raw materials. In Afghanistan, this is largely mineral-based products such as cement, dimensional stone, tiles, bricks, and quarried materials. Afghanistan has iron ore and very high-quality silicon sand, opening the door to steel, including but not limited to rebar and glass production—two products used in almost all construction projects.

The Construction Materials Action Plan focused on four areas where Afghanistan's natural resources provide the best comparative and competitive advantages: cement and concrete products, dimensional stone products, sand, gravel and aggregate, and bricks.

Although several recommendations are outlined in the action plan, one important constraint that was identified was need for quality standards, testing, and certification of the materials used in Afghanistan's construction projects. The action plan calls for developing and promoting the adoption of a set of product quality and safety standards for construction materials. This involves establishing certified construction materials laboratory testing facilities in Afghanistan

and training laboratory staff in the science of materials testing to prevent developers and contractors from using material with inappropriate specifications for infrastructure projects, resulting in poorly constructed structures with potentially disastrous results.

To address this important constraint, ABADE developed a training program on construction material testing. Thirty engineers from 17 different materials testing labs were trained in professionalism, ethics, safety, and internationally acceptable testing procedures. The training comprised theoretical and practical aspects of construction materials testing in the laboratory using international best practices, ASTM standards, and modern laboratory equipment.

ABADE identified the opportunity to introduce new products and technologies to Afghanistan's construction sector. ABADE focused specifically on training participants in the production of compressed earth bricks and cellular lightweight concrete (CLC). CLC is a faster, cheaper and greener alternative to traditional concrete masonry bricks and fire kiln bricks and has been a proven technology in use for decades internationally but had not been commercially introduced to Afghanistan.

The main objectives of ABADE's CLC workshops were to introduce CLC construction material, strengthen the productivity of enterprises for sustained growth and job creation, and encourage domestic and foreign investment in new construction materials and technologies. The training program trained 45 participants across a range of SMEs, teachers, and students from universities and government institutions.

Prior to the workshop, the local training provider sent one of its trainers to the United States to obtain training in CLC construction materials and technology. This allowed him to assist in the development of the training curriculum, as well as train four other members of the service provider's team to help conduct the workshop in an effective manner. The local training provider plans to continue with future training and will work to expand the availability of CLC in Afghanistan.

ABADE also provided stabilized compressed earth brick (SCEB) training through a local training provider. Training was conducted in three groups and completed by June 2, 2016. The program proved so popular that there were more applicants than the workshop could accommodate. A key feature of the training was the presentation of the SCEB hand press, which can be manufactured locally, deployed in any environment, and requires virtually no maintenance. The training provider constructed a hand press using plans provided by ABADE and gave demonstrations of its use. To provide hands-on practice during the training, the SCEB training provider purchased a GreenMachine™, a patented, rugged, self-contained, hydraulic machine that produces structural, precision-engineered, tongue-and-groove compressed earth blocks.

Feedback on the SCEB training was positive and the first 20,000 bricks produced as a result of the training have been sold for the construction of a building in Parwan Province, with negotiations ongoing for another contract for SCEB use in constructing a building in Kabul.

In addition to the training, ABADE prepared and disseminated investment guidelines for both SCEB and CLC, providing the rationale and options for such investments, as well as reference materials that can be used by individuals and companies interested in adopting and investing in these new technologies.

Gemstones and Jewelry Action Plan

During year three, ABADE completed the final version of the action plan for the gemstones and jewelry sector in Afghanistan. This action plan was produced with inputs from a variety of stakeholders from sector, including government agencies, NGOs, and private sector participants engaged in mining activities, gemstone trading, gem cutting, and jewelry design and production. Additional meetings were held with the MoCI and the MoMP to discuss the status of efforts to develop simplified procedures for licensing artisanal mining operations and reducing royalty rates to levels competitive with the rates charged in neighboring countries.

The top three priority constraints identified through consultations with industry stakeholders during the development of this action plan included providing training and technical assistance in gemstone cutting and polishing, recommendations for reforming artisanal mining policies and regulations, and administrative procedures.

3.2 Provide Institutional Support to the Afghan Investment Support Agency (AISA)

To improve the business enabling environment by promoting domestic and foreign investment opportunities, ABADE built in support to AISA into Component 3. In operation since 2003, AISA is responsible for the registration, licensing and promotion of investment activities in Afghanistan, giving the agency a crucial role in the country's economic future. ABADE worked closely with AISA to help the agency improve the outreach and effectiveness of its investment promotion activities. ABADE engaged a veteran investment promotion specialist to help the agency develop an investment promotion marketing plan, including the creation of presentations and marketing materials for use in their investor communications. As part of the project, the specialist sought to improve AISA systems and procedures for tracking investor leads by conducting an evaluation of AISA's current system and operations, including staff roles and responsibilities, data collection procedures, follow-up services and support, reporting methods, and overall effectiveness. Based on the results of the assessment, the investment promotion specialist constructed a customer relationship management system using Microsoft Access and cleaned up and migrated existing AISA contact data into new CRM. The consultant led two training sessions for AISA staff on the use and maintenance of the system and created a user's manual and system maintenance manual to help sustain the use of the system.

The success of ABADE's work in developing and implementing PPA alliances and supporting the MoCI in implementing their SME development strategy depended on strong collaboration with different government ministries, development organizations, and implementing partners, including stakeholder groups at the national and regional levels throughout the duration of the program. The regional ABADE offices of Herat, Mazari Sharif, and Jalalabad worked closely with the regional offices of the MoCI, the MoWA, and AISA, the Office of the Governor, the provincial



Department of Economy, Chambers of Commerce, industrial unions, and financial institutions, including USAID implementing partners and other donor-funded projects operating at the regional level. Due to the volatility of the security situation and political instability in the region, building relationships and opening lines of communication among stakeholders was a crucial part of supporting a multifaceted program such as ABADA.

Summary of Problems/Obstacles Encountered During Implementation

The ABADE program experienced a number of challenges over the course of implementation, largely centered on the worsening security situation and a complicated political and business environment that impacted the procurement of equipment required for the alliances.

Delays in PPA implementation were an overriding concern from the beginning of the program, with many of the delays beyond ABADE's control, including those stemming from the lengthy and complicated process of reregistering companies with AISA. When the new government was formed in 2014, the change in management at AISA exacerbated the already slow process of annual license renewal. ABADE required that all SME partners have updated business licenses, and once a PPA's business registration had lapsed, all activities relating to that PPA were suspended. This was especially problematic if procurement had begun and the equipment was already in transit.

Lack of proper coordination and communication between ministries was also a critical issue in implementation. For example, there was a disagreement between the MoMP and the Ministry of Finance (MoF) regarding the royalty rates for the marble and gemstone sectors, a situation that generated mistrust and discontent among the marble and gemstone sector associations and limited their participation in working group meetings. ABADE engaged with the MoF, MoMP and MoCI on this issue, and they committed to create more effective inter-ministerial coordination and to seek input from the private sector on revising their existing policies and work plans going forward.

Subsequent delays were caused by the impact of Afghanistan's degrading security situation on the overall economy. As economic growth slowed due to increased security concerns, many of ABADE's alliance partners struggled to complete their deliverables on time. In the majority of alliances, enterprise partners were responsible for preparing the site or facility to house ABADE-procured equipment or for purchasing a part of the production line. When partners were unable to complete their deliverables, installation of the equipment was delayed. In several cases, ABADE was forced to warehouse equipment until the partner was ready to receive it; other partners had to withdraw from the alliance altogether due to lack of funds.

The security situation also raised transportation issues at the Pakistan border. The majority of shipments for PPAs went through the port of Karachi and were then hauled on trucks through either the Torkham or Spin Boldak border into Afghanistan and to the partner sites. At times, the Pakistan-Afghanistan border was closed for more than a month, delaying ABADE shipments. When the border reopened in late March 2017 after a closure, both governments imposed new regulations that required additional documentation and inspections. This caused additional delays, and shipments incurred unforeseen detention and demurrage costs.

Lack of technical expertise in Afghanistan was another constraint affecting several alliances during the program. Much of the equipment and many of the production lines procured by ABADA introduced new or improved technology to the businesses. Installation, integration into the existing production line, and staff training all required expert assistance. Technical expertise for this effort was lacking in Afghanistan, and security concerns often prevented Turkish, Chinese, and other experts from traveling to Afghanistan. ABADA sought alternative solutions, such as hiring Pakistani experts, who were more willing to travel to Afghanistan. ABADA also sought to send Afghan engineers to other countries for training; however, this too was challenging, given the inability of Afghan citizens to get travel visas.

ABADA's investment alliances encouraged businesses to adopt new technologies as a means of increasing productivity and efficiency. A major cause of delay in the procurement of equipment for partners was selecting the appropriate machinery for the project. Selection was done jointly by the PPA partner and the ABADA specialist, and procurement would not begin without the partner's agreement. In many instances, the partner requested a different type of machinery or specification, after the process was underway. If partners stood firm on the new selection, ABADA began the process of procurement all over again. To prevent this situation, ABADA stayed in close communications with the partners, meeting with and educating them on the processes involved in procurement. Regular communication had the added benefit of assuring partners that their concerns were being addressed and made them aware that some stages of the process took time to complete, and therefore changes in equipment resulted in long delays.

Offloading equipment from the shipper was an unanticipated expense that was not accounted for in either the partner's or ABADA's contribution. Depending on the size of the machinery, offloading costs were significant, and the PPA partners complained about this unbudgeted expense on many occasions. The costs were later built in to the shipping costs to avoid unpleasant surprises.

Customs clearance for internationally procured equipment was a challenge that persisted throughout the first three years of the project. Goods were held at Karzai International Airport and the Karachi Port in Pakistan for five months on average. A shipment of electronic payment machines was held at Karzai International Airport for nine months. These delays caused unbudgeted demurrage and detention charges. ABADA negotiated relentlessly and followed up with the applicable government agencies, primarily the Afghanistan Customs Department, MoF, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and ministries with regulatory functions. USAID played a major role in resolving these issues, especially the U.S. Ambassador, the USAID Mission Director, the USAID Regional Legal Office and the USAID Technical Office. On September 2, 2015, at a ministerial council meeting chaired by President Ashraf Ghani, the council approved tax exemption for ABADA-procured equipment, including tax exemptions for the ABADA partners receiving the equipment. The minutes of the meeting were distributed to the finance and foreign affairs ministries and to customs. Shipments being held at various points of entry began to clear customs in the following quarter.

Notifications of Delay

ABADE's administrative staff provided eleven notifications of delay to USAID over the course of the program to address specific concerns and constraints which had the potential to delay the program's progress and deliverables. The notifications are summarized below:

January 20, 2014

With notice AO 004, ABADE provided USAID with information about ongoing delays in receiving approvals from the System for Award Registration and in the vetting of non-U.S. contractors and key personnel. In late 2013, the processes were taking up to two months to be completed, resulting in ongoing delays in forming PPAs, directly affecting the number of PPAs that the program was able to implement.

March 20, 2014

In AO 069, ABADE briefed USAID about issues related to risk management personnel being unable to obtain and review visas due to an unresolved issue with the Medium Tax Office. ABADE's risk management was provided by UK-based Pilgrims, which had ended up having to operate under a temporary AISA license due to a disagreement about previous payments received by the tax office. The temporary license meant that Pilgrims was unable to obtain Ministry of Foreign Affairs numbers for issuing new visas and visa renewals, which were required to keep ABADE's risk management personnel in country or to return them to country after leave rotations. Without risk management personnel, ABADE staff would be unable to travel safely within country or to and from the airport, leaving program operations effectively frozen. ABADE resolved the ongoing issue by ending the relationship with Pilgrims and hiring a new risk management company.

June 16, 2014

Vetting delays were raised in notice AO 115, given the length of time it was taking to receive eligibility notices from the vetting process. An eligibility notice was a pre-condition for approval and implementation of PPAs. At the time the notice was sent, ABADE had 60 outstanding vetting requests, with 24 outstanding for longer than one month.

December 16, 2014

ABADE alerted USAID to ongoing customs delays in a memorandum to Agreement Officer Peggy Manthe. Under the finance ministry, the Afghanistan Customs Department had stated that because equipment procured by ABADE would be dispositioned to private PPA partners, such equipment would be subject to customs duties at the prevailing rate at the time of disposition. This decision was contrary to the bilateral agreement between the U.S. Government and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, which exempted USAID-funded activities from customs duties and taxes. The hold placed on containers of equipment was also creating unexpected costs for the program. Due to a lack of decree between customs and the finance ministry, and because tax rates in Afghanistan are not explicitly outlined or equally applied, ABADE could not accurately estimate the taxes and duties that were expected to result, most of which would have fallen on alliance partners. General estimates put the customs bill at

\$650,000 for the 140 PPAs that were active at the time, resulting in a potential tax assessment of around \$2 million over the life of the program.

USAID responded to the December 2014 notice on January 4, 2015, stating that agreements had been made with Afghanistan's Deputy Finance Minister and General Directorate of Customs to release the nine-months-held electronic payment devices, free of customs tax. As part of the agreement, ABADE was required to retain title ownership of all equipment for at least 6 months, or until final resolution of the tax issue occurred. USAID charged ABADE with informing alliance partners of the new agreement on the transfer of ownership.

September 17, 2015

ABADE continued to experience delays in customs clearances and approvals of PPA applications, highlighted in AO 396. At the time of the notice, the program had 39 PPAs pending USAID approval, some dating as far back as February and April of 2015. This, coupled with the ongoing customs issues that remained unresolved, had a negative effect on ABADE's ability to implement PPAs and meet associated targets and deliverables.

July 6, 2016

High employee turnover rates in critical departments began to dramatically affect ABADE's ability to maintain its work plan schedule, as explained in AO 452. A number of program staff had been hired directly by USAID and its implementing partners, an issue that became more prominent as closeout approached. With experienced local national staff taking positions with other development programs, the ABADE procurement department was left with just one local national procurement specialist remaining to handle the 57 open procurements.

From December 2015 to the time of the notice, ABADE had lost eleven employees to the Special Immigration Visa program, scholarship programs at U.S. academic institutions, marriage to an approved visa applicant planning to emigrate to the United States, and to other implementing partners. As the program moved into its final year, the ABADE management team recognized the possibility of retention becoming an issue and conducted a market survey in October and November 2015 of local national staff working in and around Kabul. The purpose was to update the local national compensation tables to retain local staff through the close of the program. The program also introduced a retention bonus to motivate staff to remain until the end of program activities.

August 24, 2016

On August 9, 2016, ABADE received a notification of ineligibility from USAID for the Q Kabul Hotel, location of the program's expatriate staff accommodations and administrative offices. The notification required the program to remove its staff, IT infrastructure, and property from the Q Kabul Hotel by October 1, 2016. This situation was further exacerbated when ABADE was notified by USAID's Partner Liaison Security Office that the hotel was due to be seized by the Afghan government. Given the immediate need to move to different facilities, ABADE notified USAID of the resulting program delay in AO 456, and suspended programmatic operations between August 25 and September 11, 2016 to focus exclusively on relocation. During this

period, ABADe local operations and expatriate staff were fully focused on the relocation and program staff were on paid leave.

June 26, 2017

ABADe alerted USAID in AO 487 to potential delays in the closeout schedule, due to unexpected delays in the transportation of equipment for PPA partners. Specifically, these delays were related to rail transportation from China. Rail transport options to Afghanistan became available in December 2016, with the potential to reduce shipment time from four months by sea to one month by rail. However, due to increased security concerns in Afghanistan, transporters began to hold shipments because of the potential for hijacking and terrorist attacks. In several cases, this issue meant that equipment required for the implementation of ABADe's final PPAs was delayed past the scheduled closeout period. In this notice, ABADe also raised concerns about continued vetting and sub-award increase approval delays that were constraining program operations.

Assessment of the Performance in Accomplishing the Project's Objectives

The ABADE program exceeded LOP targets in all indicator areas, making a substantial impact on 518 SMEs in Afghanistan. The program received 1,347 concept notes, from which 298 well-qualified PPAs were implemented, including 270 SME alliances and 28 innovation alliances. Management practices at 268 enterprises were improved as a result of ABADE assistance, and a staggering 17,777 full-time equivalent jobs were created.

“ABADE motivated us to invest and expand our business to better serve our customers in [the] summer season.”

— Hajji Kazim, Badghis Ice Production Company

For every dollar of USAID assistance, \$5.98 was invested by the partners, resulting in over \$292 million being invested in the Afghan economy, \$250,208,215 of which was from private sector funds. This helped to spur a 245 percent increase in sales at ABADE's PPA partner firms, which is 1,225 percent of the LOP target. The boost in sales was the direct result of increases in production and the product expansion facilitated by new and/or upgraded equipment (and critical training on that equipment) received as part of the partnerships. As a result of the training in bookkeeping practices, marketing, and general business skills that ABADE provided, PPAs are better able to track inventory, develop business and marketing plans, and identify and address workforce skill gaps to improve their opportunities for success.

ABADE specifically addressed the needs and concerns of women entrepreneurs and employees with training in high-value skills and through initiatives to provide alternative workplace models for women. In total, 274 women received training in high-value skills, including ICT, diagnostic imaging, CAD, materials testing, and QuickBooks software and accounting. Over the course of the program, 61 alternative workplace models were put in place at partner businesses to accommodate the cultural and safety barriers to women's participation in the workforce. These alternative workplace models included home-based employment, on-site child care options, and the creation of women-only offices and production areas.

To improve the business enabling environment, ABADE developed six action plans to identify and address constraints in starting or sustaining a business in Afghanistan. The action plans focused on six sectors: carpets, construction materials, gemstones and jewelry, women's SMEs, agribusiness, and marble. With six constraints addressed by program completion, or 150 percent of the LOP target, ABADE provided the Afghan government, its ministries, partners, and stakeholders with detailed plans to continue improving its most crucial and profitable sectors.

“With ABADE's assistance, we trained 80 women in tailoring and it will help them to earn money and work from home.”

— Farishta Shamsuddin, Asma Handicrafts Company

One constraint that was addressed by ABADE has the potential to have a huge impact on the Afghan economy, that is, the exorbitant transportation costs faced by Afghan carpet producers if they wish to export their goods to a wider market. In cooperation with the MoCI and Turkish Airlines, ABADE successfully negotiated a drastically reduced rate for airfreight to Europe and the United States, with a memorandum of understanding signed by the MoCI in 2016. This agreement will help sustain the growth of the lucrative carpet industry in Afghanistan, creating jobs and expanding the reach of quality Afghan exports for years to come.

In June 2017, IESC conducted a beneficiary survey of 278 enterprises that had been involved in the ABADE program. Responses from across Afghanistan were overwhelmingly positive, with 99 percent stating that ABADE had a positive impact on their enterprise or organization and that new jobs were created as a result.

Significance of Activities and Accomplishments

The heart of the ABADA program was its public-private investment partnerships with existing Afghan SMEs. Access to financing to upgrade equipment or expand production is a stumbling block for SMEs worldwide, constraining economic growth and job creation. Facilitating access to such financing can deliver real results. In Afghanistan, enterprises not only face ongoing security concerns, which complicate operating conditions, but options for business financing come with incredibly high interest rates and strict repayment terms. Without financing and investment opportunities, many businesses are unable to compete with the wave of imports arriving daily from neighboring countries. Pressure to export natural resources for pennies on the dollar, and the heavy loss of skilled and educated workers to markets abroad, compound the constraints currently impacting local businesses.

The country's economic independence depends on the ability to compete in the world market by bolstering its manufacturing capabilities. Between 2012 and 2017, ABADA's 298 alliances created opportunities for businesses to expand production and helped a further 220 businesses improve their processes. By harnessing the dedication of local businesses that are committed to staying in the region, ABADA supported Afghan business owners to implement their own plans for growth, leading to the creation of more than 17,777 jobs. ABADA took on the intensive process of identifying and procuring industry-specific equipment for enterprises operating in agriculture, marble, construction, food processing, health care, and waste management, and substantially increased both the domestic and foreign investment in Afghanistan.

Afghan women looking to enter the workforce and start their own businesses face a unique set of challenges. Always respecting Afghan cultural mores, ABADA addressed these issues during the program's initial outreach and in the development of alliances involving women-owned businesses and businesses looking to improve employment opportunities for women. Alternative workplace models, including women-only and home-based work environments, helped the program to generate a large number of jobs for women. The success of ABADA's high-value skills training in ICT, diagnostic imaging, and bookkeeping proved that, given the opportunity, women *and* businesses both benefit from an inclusive workforce in Afghanistan.

Program Impact and Expected Sustainable Results

The ABADE program achieved LOP targets in all indicator areas and exceeded 12 of the 13, making a substantial and sustainable impact on 518 SMEs in Afghanistan through investment assistance, training and technical assistance. ABADE achieved 104 percent of its goal to assist 500 SMEs during the course of the project.

ABADE's commitment to early outreach and support, from informational seminars in provinces around the country to writing workshops and application assistance, resulted in the submission of 1,347 concept notes. From these applications, 298 well-qualified PPAs were implemented, including 270 SME alliances and 28 innovation alliances. The program's adherence to robust and detailed PPA implementation procedures was crucial to the success of the alliances. Sourcing equipment, providing technical assistance, and delivering training in bookkeeping, food safety and other compliance standards, and marketing contributed to the staggering 17,777 full-time equivalent jobs created, exceeding the target by 19 percent.

268 firms improved their management practices, a 179 percent achievement of the target. For every dollar of USAID assistance, \$5.98 was invested by the partners, resulting in over \$292 million being invested in the Afghan economy, \$250,208,215 of which was from private sector funds. These investments and technical assistance helped to spur a 245 percent increase in sales at alliance partner enterprises, a 1,225 percent increase on the LOP target. The boost in sales was the direct result of increases in production and the product expansion facilitated by new and/or upgraded equipment (and critical training on that equipment) received as part of the partnerships. The complementary assistance provided in the PPA package ensured that enterprises could operate the equipment successfully and apply their training in bookkeeping, marketing, and general business skills to position themselves for sustainable success.

The ABADE program addressed the needs and concerns of women entrepreneurs and employees by providing training in high-value skills and developing alternative workplace models for women. 274 women received training in ICT, diagnostic imaging, CAD, materials testing, and QuickBooks software and accounting, achieving 137 percent of the program's target. 61 alternative workplace models were put in place at alliance partner businesses, a 153 percent achievement of target.

ABADE developed six action plans to identify and address constraints in starting or sustaining a business in Afghanistan. The six sectors ABADE focused on were carpets, construction materials, gemstones and jewelry, women's SMEs, agribusiness, and marble mining and processing. Six constraints were addressed by program completion, achieving 150 percent of the LOP target. As an example, ABADE successfully negotiated a drastically reduced rate for airfreight to Europe and the United States, which will go a long way to support Afghan carpet producers looking to export their goods to a wider market.



By providing SMEs in the country with an opportunity to procure improved equipment and technologies, by addressing skill gaps with industry-specific training programs, and by supporting innovative enterprises that are changing the landscape of business in Afghanistan, ABADA benefitted 4,914,616 beneficiaries throughout the country, achieving 6,143 percent of the target.

Although enterprises in Afghanistan face a complicated business environment ahead, largely related to issues of security, transportation, and government policy, ABADA delivered a sustainable impact that will ensure that locally-owned companies continue to build on their experience, fortitude, and well-earned results.

Cumulative Data for Numerical Targets

MEP Ind	Performance Indicator <i>(Source of information)</i>	Life-of-Project Totals		
		LOP Target	Total	%
I. Tier I Indicators				
1	500 SMEs supported with ABADE assistance <i>(SME registration forms)</i>	500	518	104%
2	150 private sector firms that have improved management practices as a result of USG assistance <i>(SME registration forms and survey forms)</i>	150	268	179%
3	200 firms receiving USG assistance to invest in improved technologies <i>(SME registration forms)</i>	200	284	142%
4	260 SME public-private alliances formed as a result of ABADE assistance <i>(SME PPA agreements)</i>	260	270	104%
5	25 innovation public-private alliances formed <i>(Innovation PPA agreements)</i>	25	28	112%
6	USD 180 million in private sector investments created <i>(Innovation and SME PPA agreements)</i>	\$180,000,000	\$292,048,537	162%
7	20% increase in sales by public-private alliance SMEs <i>(SME registration forms and survey forms)</i>	20%	245%	1225%
8	40 initiatives that provide alternative workplace models for women <i>(Initiative registration forms)</i>	40	61	153%
9	200 women trained in "high value" skills <i>(Graduate registration forms)</i>	200	274	137%
10	6 action plans accepted by MoCI <i>(Action plan acceptance forms)</i>	6	6	100%
11	4 regulatory constraints addressed <i>(Constraint addressed forms)</i>	4	6	150%
II. Tier II Indicators				
A	15,000 full-time equivalent jobs created <i>(SME registration forms and survey forms)</i>	15,000	17,777	119%
B	80,000 beneficiaries <i>(Beneficiary forms)</i>	80,000	4,914,616	6143%

List of Project Documents and Other Reference Materials

Year/Type	Project Documents
Fiscal Year 2013 – Reports	FY 2013 – Quarterly Progress Report Q1
	FY 2013 – Quarterly Progress Report Q2
	FY 2013 – Quarterly Progress Report Q3
	FY 2013 – Annual Report
Fiscal Year 2014 – Reports	FY 2014 – Quarterly Progress Report Q1
	FY 2014 – Quarterly Progress Report Q2
	FY 2014 – Quarterly Progress Report Q3
	FY 2014 – Annual Report
Fiscal Year 2015 – Reports	FY 2015 – Quarterly Progress Report Q1
	FY 2015 – Quarterly Progress Report Q2
	FY 2015 – Quarterly Progress Report Q3
	FY 2015 – Annual Report
Fiscal Year 2016 – Reports	FY 2016 – Quarterly Progress Report Q1
	FY 2016 – Quarterly Progress Report Q2
	FY 2016 – Quarterly Progress Report Q3
	FY 2016 – Annual Report
Fiscal Year 2017 – Reports	FY 2017 – Quarterly Progress Report Q1
	FY 2017 – Quarterly Progress Report Q2
	FY 2017 – Quarterly Progress Report Q3
	FY 2017 – Quarterly Progress Report Q4
Work Plans	Year 1 Workplan – FY13
	Year 2 Workplan – FY14
	Year 3 Workplan – FY15
	Year 4 Workplan – FY16
	Year 5 Workplan – FY17
Other	Branding and Marking Plan

Findings

The ABADA program achieved LOP targets in all indicator areas and exceeded 12 of 13, making a substantial and sustainable impact on 518 SMEs in Afghanistan. Most notably, ABADA created 17,777 full-time equivalent jobs, exceeding the target by 19 percent. Working at the enterprise level, as ABADA did, creates sustainable impact within those enterprises that will endure long beyond the end of the program.

By design, ABADA worked at the microeconomic level, and therefore its impact at the sector or value-chain level is not entirely clear. Although the RFA highlighted construction, carpets, gemstones and marble as industries with the greatest opportunity to meet USAID goals and objectives, there was not an emphasis on achieving mesoeconomic results within these industries. The following is from the RFA:

“ABADA, modeled in part on ASMED, will predominantly focus on enabling the private sector to address key gaps that hamper expansion and job creation, i.e., productivity of selected enterprises. The program will focus on SMEs that offer both short- and long-term potential for contributing to Afghanistan’s economic growth through job creation, increased domestic and foreign investment, and an improved trade balance through the increased sales of domestically produced goods and services...”

While ABADA is a nationwide program without geographic or sector restrictions, the geographic location of most public-private alliance SME partnerships is expected to be primarily in or near major population centers in key economic zones, enhancing the overall impact of the limited ABADA budget. While Public-Private Alliances must be chosen on the merit of an individual business plan, the implementer will be expected to concentrate such alliances, in key economic zones in so far as possible.”

Had the program been designed with a mesoeconomic rather than a microeconomic focus, ABADA could have achieved similar results and impact at Afghan enterprises, but with known impact at the sector or value-chain level by defining, targeting, and measuring results at the sector or value-chain level.

Comments and Recommendations

By achieving or exceeding all 13 indicator targets, ABADE achieved the objectives and results outlined by USAID in both the RFA and the resulting cooperative agreement. As the prime implementer, IESC believes that the ABADE PPA model (used previously under ASMED) is highly successful in transforming Afghan enterprises, generating value addition, producing substantial increases in sales and employment. However, we recommend that future interventions be designed with a mesoeconomic approach, including indicators at the sector and/or value-chain level and explicitly building the capacity of suppliers and support providers within a value chain, in addition to the firms producing and selling the finished product.

We conclude this report by commending and thanking our counterparts at USAID for all of their hard work and commitment, working hand-in-hand in partnership with IESC and with ABADE staff to generate the substantial results for Afghan enterprises, and by extension, the people of Afghanistan.

Annex 1 – Video Index of ABADE’s Public-Private Alliances in Action, 2012–2017

Please click the pictures below to access the videos about ABADE’s PPAs.

The Faces of ABADE



Noor Jewelry Service Company



Kabul Bahar Dairy Production Company



Kabul Automatic Mosaic Production Company



Green Organic Agricultural Production



Farah Farhat Faizi Ltd.



Afghanistan Rugs and Carpet Center (ARCC)



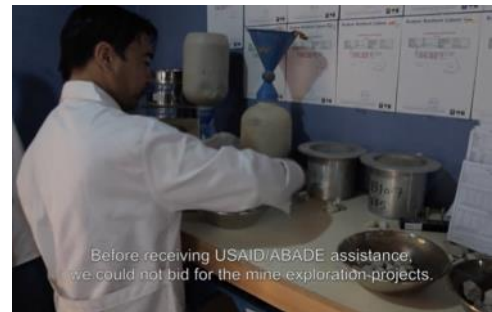
Bahawar Spinning Industrial Company



Hanifa/Akrami Jewelry



Diamond Geo Engineering Services Company



Payame Noor Educational and Social Services



AsiaPharma Manufacturer of Syringe and Medical Equipment Company



Barakat Bazr Improved Agricultural Seed and Grains Company



Qasre Zeba Beauty Parlor



Cashmere Fibres Afghan Ltd.



Habib Sadat/Said Shafiq



High Value Skills Training for Women



Aria Afghan Building Paint Company



Heray Paper and Bag Production



Afghanistan Red Gold Saffron Company



Mohtabar Shoes Manufacturing Company



Hami Nama Advertising Company



Waraq Talaeiy Industrial Company



Sabah Khisrawi Handicraft



Panel Tech



Gold Star Sharq



Hasina Food Production Company



Maisam Steel Mill



Mazatoo Food Industry Company



Radiology Training for Women



Mohammad Basir



Muska Ball & Leather Production Company



Bozurg Afghan J.V Nut Processing Company



Sarra Design



Piroz Star Food Materials Production Co.



Mahmood Zada Wood Industry Co.



Baradaran Ihsani Marble Industries



Khawar Shoes



Pardaz Advertisement and Media Services



Samiullah Kalizada Industrial Company



Shamshad Plastic



Armin Food Materials Production Company



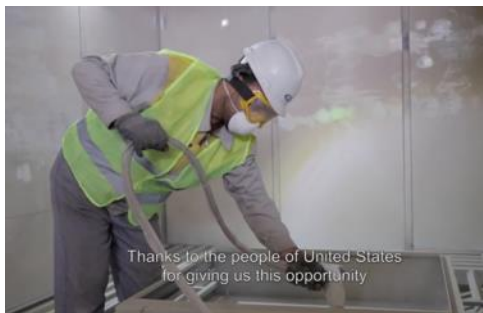
Atlas Furniture Production Company



Faranges Food Items



Kardan Balkh Industrial Production



Pakiza Livestock and Dairy Production



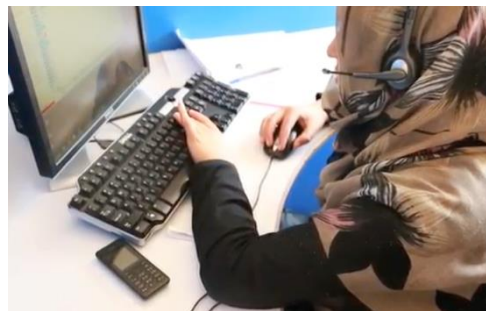
Parwaz Prof Aluminum PVC Production



Suratgar Printing Press



Marikh Tech



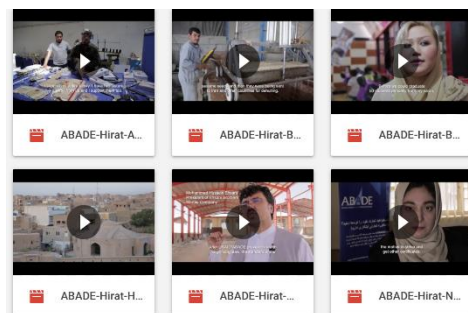
Sun Pharma Vitamin Syrup



Tabesh Balkhi Carpet Weaving Company



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Annex 2 – Complete List of Training

Training Activity	Province	Start Date	End Date	Number of Trainees	Number of Males	Number of Females
Promotions and marketing	Kabul	25/09/13		15	0	15
2013 TOTAL				15	0	15
Double-entry bookkeeping		2014		12		
Marketing and brand management training				12		
Business planning				15		
QuickBooks training		2/2014		15		
Business planning				15		
Food safety inspection training	Kabul	2014		29		
Computer-aided design (CAD) training		25/12/13	15/01/2014	19		19
Outreach and marketing skills training		17/11/13		9		9
Website development training		31/12/13		21		21
2014 TOTAL				147		
Double-entry accounting	Kabul	23/11/14	12/06/14	24	19	5
Marketing and brand management (for non-PPA SMEs)	Kabul	25/11/14	12/02/14	22	16	6
Nail technician training	Kabul	04/01/15	14/05/15	21	0	21
TOT training for business service providers	Kabul	06/01/15	06/01/15	7	6	1
Tattoo hygiene	Herat	17/02/15	17/02/15	8	0	8
	Balkh	19/02/15	19/02/15	10	0	10

Double-entry accounting	Balkh	22/02/15	26/02/15	27	22	5
	Herat	22/02/15	26/02/15	28	19	9
Marketing and sales management	Herat	28/02/15	03/08/15	13	8	5
	Balkh	28/02/15	03/05/15	16	10	6
	Nangarhar	28/02/15	03/04/15	25	24	1
Carpet market access	Balkh	17/03/15	18/03/15	24	24	0
Nail technician training (held in Kabul for Herat participants)	Herat	07/04/15	07/12/15	37	0	37
Wool washing and dyeing (clothes and fabric)	Nangarhar	13/04/15	13/04/15	21	21	0
Wool washing and dyeing (carpet yarn)	Balkh	15/04/15	15/04/15	55	26	29
Second round double-entry accounting	Herat	18/04/15	22/04/15	28	20	8
Wool washing and dyeing (carpet yarn)	Herat	20/04/15	20/04/15	47	31	16
Second round double-entry accounting	Balkh	04/05/15	23/04/15	25	23	2
Business registration for women	Kabul	17/05/15	19/05/15	22	0	22
TOT for business services providers	Herat	26/05/15	26/05/15	18	15	3
	Balkh	31/05/15	31/05/15	14	12	2
Ultrasound training	Kabul	02/06/15	06/09/15	24	0	24
Carpet market access	Balkh	14/06/15	14/06/15	16	16	0
Materials testing	Kabul	15/06/15	07/09/15	19	0	19
Carpet market access	Kabul	16/06/15	16/06/15	21	20	1
QuickBooks (held in Kabul for Jalalabad participants)	Herat	06/07/15	14/06/15	17	9	8
QuickBooks (held in Kabul for Jalalabad participants)	Jalalabad	06/07/15	06/11/15	18	13	5
QuickBooks training	Kabul	06/07/15	14/06/15	17	10	7
Third round double-entry accounting	Kabul	07/07/15	14/07/15	25	24	1
QuickBooks training	Balkh	26/07/15	08/04/15	15	9	6
Double-entry accounting	Nangarhar	03/08/15	03/12/15	27	26	1
Second round QuickBooks	Balkh	23/08/15	31/08/15	14	8	6
Carpet market access	Kabul	03/09/15	03/10/15	20	18	2

Business licensing for women SMEs	Kabul	05/10/15	05/12/15	27	0	27
Second round double-entry accounting	Nangarhar	04/12/15	16/04/15	26	26	0
Wool washing and dyeing (carpet yarn dyeing)	Nangarhar	04/12/15	04/12/15	51	19	32
2015 TOTAL				829	494	35
Computer networking/ Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA) training	Herat	8/16/15	10/18/15	19	0	19
Double-entry accounting training	Herat	10/26/15	11/1/15	29	24	5
Medical laboratory technician training	Kabul	11/07/15	12/30/15	24	0	24
Double-entry accounting	Herat	10/01/16	24/1/16	24	16	8
Marketing and brand management	Jalalabad	13/3/16	20/3/16	25	24	1
Training of technologists in diagnostic imagery – CT	Kabul	10/04/16	17/5/16	12	2	10
Public relations and marketing	Kabul	29/05/16	6/6/16	16	15	1
Training of technologists in diagnostic imagery- ultrasound	Kabul	8/01/16	8/21/16	13	0	13
Training of technologists in diagnostic imagery – mammography	Kabul	7/31/16	8/13/16	12	0	12
2016 TOTAL				174	81	94
QuickBooks training and implementation	Kabul	12/4/16	12/27/16	13	13	0
	Mazari Sharif	12/4/16	12/27/16	10	9	1
	Jalalabad	12/4/16	12/27/16	12	12	0
	Herat	12/4/16	12/27/16	15	14	1
2017 TOTAL				50	48	2
OVERALL TOTAL				1215		

Annex 3 – Complete List of Public-Private Alliances and Descriptions ([Link](#))

Below is an example of a PPA description from the PPA booklet produced by ABADE. To access the full booklet, please click the link above.



PPA-A002: Pine Nut Processing Facility Establishment

Province – Kabul
District – Kabul
Agri Food Trade BV & Bozurg Afghan J.V Nut Processing Company

Start date – June-13
End date – February-17

Contact information:
Phone – +93783699957 / +93785284766 / 0782075213 / 0788122427
E-mail – qader144@hotmail.com

AgriFood Trade BV and Bozurg Afghan Nut Processing Company entered into a joint venture to establish and operate a soft shell pine nut processing factory in Kabul. Most of Afghanistan's pine nuts are currently exported to Pakistan for pennies on the dollar due to lack of processing facilities in the country. AgriFood Trade is an international food production company registered in the Netherlands, while Bozurg is an Afghan producer and exporter of dried fruit and nuts. After the partners completed construction of a new warehouse and offices, installed cold storage, a laboratory, and a wastewater system, ABADE delivered the de-shelling and processing equipment. In an effort to promote conservation of the Chilgoza pines in Eastern Afghanistan, ABADE commissioned two professors from Kabul University to conduct surveys of Chilgoza pine forests and the communities that harvest the nuts between December 2015 and June 2016. The research was used to develop a training manual and set of guidelines for the sustainable harvesting of the cones. With the sustainable harvesting techniques in place and new equipment fully operational, the companies expect to begin processing pine nuts this harvest season, with 75 factory jobs created and further support for 2,500 collectors in the remote regions of Eastern Afghanistan.



Annex 4 – Beneficiary Survey ([Link](#))

Below is an example of a received beneficiary survey form. To access all beneficiary survey forms, please click the link above.

PPA-A002

Created	2017-06-07 11:23:15 UTC by Aleksandra Andrakovic
Updated	2017-06-15 07:11:51 UTC by Tooryalai Shirzai
Location	,

Basic Information

PPA Number	PPA-A002
Company Name	Buzurg-e-Afghan Dry Fruit Process
Company Sector	Manufacturing, Dried and Dehydrated Food Manufacturing
Company size (number of employees)	Small (10-50)
Location (Province)	Kabul
PPA Title	Pine Nut Processing Facility Establishment
Person Interviewed - Name	Qadiri
Person Interviewed - Gender	Male
Person Interviewed - Phone #	0788122427

Survey Questions

1. What type of assistance did your company/organization receive from the ABADE program? Please select all that apply	Funding or purchase of equipment or machinery (or other) to support your business' expansion, Technical assistance on business financial documentation, planning or reporting
Technical assistance on business financial documentation, planning or reporting	Very useful
Funding or purchase of equipment or machinery (or other) to support your business' expansion	Very useful
2. Are you satisfied with the overall assistance that ABADE provided to your company/organization?	Very satisfied
2. Please provide comments	Partner said,ABADE assistance was really helpful.