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## **Government of Afghanistan Signs \$125 million Grant with the World Bank to Improve Rural Roads**

**KABUL, July 22, 2012** — Afghanistan's Ministry of Finance and the World Bank today signed a \$125 million grant from the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) to finance the improvement and maintenance of secondary and tertiary rural roads as well as the construction of bridges, together with support for implementation and capacity building activities.

The **Afghanistan Rural Access Project (ARAP)** aims to enable rural communities across Afghanistan to benefit from improved access to basic services and facilities through all-weather roads. The project is expected to increase the number of people living within 2 km of all-season roads, reduce travel time to essential services, and enable rural people to access essential services more frequently. The total cost of the project is estimated to be around \$332 million of which the World Bank financed \$125 million. The World Bank administered multi-donor trust fund – ARTF – will finance the remaining \$207 million.

*“Given that nearly eighty percent of Afghans live in rural areas, building rural infrastructure is crucial for the people's well-being and prosperity, as well as for economic growth,” said **HE Dr. Mustafa Mastoor, Deputy Finance Minister, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.** “Connecting villages with each other and with towns and cities will not only improve villagers' welfare, but also help bring peace, stability and prosperity. If one village is connected with another, new employment opportunities will open up, access to basic services such as health and education will improve, and businesses will prosper.”*

The Afghanistan Rural Access Project (ARAP) follows on from the series of World Bank projects that have supported the Government's National Rural Access Program (NRAP) over the past ten years, together with financing from the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF). NRAP has been one of the Government's national priority programs that share a broader vision of enhancing human security, equitable growth and integrating the rural economy with the regional market, through the provision of sustainable rural access to basic services. To date, with support from the World Bank and the ARTF, the Government of Afghanistan has been able to rehabilitate or built more than 10,500 km of secondary and tertiary road networks across the country. Moreover, these interventions have created over 16 million labor days opportunities for Afghans throughout the country.

Two decades of civil war inflicted severe damage to Afghanistan's road network, both to main highways as well as rural roads. As the nation started to emerge from the conflict in 2001, only a tenth of the estimated 130,000 km of roads was in good condition.

Today, Afghanistan's tertiary road network is estimated at 80,000 km, of which only about 7,000 km are accessible to motor vehicles in all seasons; the rest are tracks mostly inaccessible to motor vehicles. Among the roads that remain accessible to motor vehicles all year, an estimated 5,000 km are believed to be in maintainable state, while the rest are in poor condition and need rehabilitation.

*“Alleviating poverty through interventions that help create jobs, provide access to basic services and create an enabling environment to private sector investments remains the World Bank’s paramount focus in its support of government efforts,” said Bob Saum, World Bank Country Director for Afghanistan. “The rehabilitation of rural infrastructure so far has led to encouraging improvements in rural livelihoods. Many villages are, for the first time, connected to markets. People have easy access to health facilities and more children are able to go to school. We will continue to support government efforts in sustaining this progress and help it to expand into villages where Afghans still wait to benefit from rural development activities.”*

The Ministries of Public Works and Rural Rehabilitation and Development will continue to implement The Afghanistan Rural Access Project (ARAP) over a period of five years.

The **Afghanistan Rural Access Project (ARAP)** consists of three main components:

1. The Ministry of Public Works will continue to improve and maintain secondary road networks. Specifically, MPW will rehabilitate some 1,000 km of secondary roads; upgrade 250 km of existing pavement to bituminous standard; conduct routine and periodic maintenance of 1,000 km of paved and unpaved secondary roads, and construct about 1,000 linear meters of bridges.
2. The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) will rehabilitate 1300 km of tertiary roads, conduct routine and periodic maintenance of 2,000 km of tertiary roads, and construct 1,600 linear meters of bridges.
3. To achieve institutional sustainability for managing the road network, the project will support both MRRD and MPW efforts in:
  - Strengthening network planning, development and management system
  - Developing a comprehensive system for rural road design standards and cost estimation, and research and development
  - Developing a road inventory and condition inventory

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