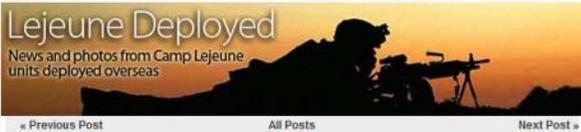


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USAID brings development to Kajaki

July 19th, 2012, 10:28 am · Post a Comment · posted by Amanda Hickey

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Afghan workers clear a tree from the Kajaki District Center in Helmand province, Afghanistan, July 7, 2012. This marks the beginning of U.S. Agency for International Development-funded redevelopment projects in the region. Over the next six months, local workers will refurbish a school, health clinic and bazaar stalls. The projects are designed to help bring stability to the district and help locals develop trade skills. These are the first USAID projects in the area since the 1970s.

CPL KENNETH JASIK
 Regimental Combat Team 6
 KAJAKI DISTRICT, Afghanistan – For the first time since the 1970s, the U.S. Agency for International Development has begun implementing projects in Kajaki District.
 On July 7th, Afghan workers started refurbishing the Kajaki District Center, the local headquarters for the Afghan government.
 “The projects have been in the planning stage for the past couple months now,” said Rod R. Walker, a U.S. State Department officer. “Today was the first day in the district center refurbishment, which is the first in a series of projects (the) Central Asia Development Group is doing.”
 CADG is a non-governmental organization partnered with USAID.
 The group also plans on refurbishing a health clinic and about 50 stalls within a local bazaar. CADG hired local workers to help with all the

projects.
 “With this level of activity, we plan on employing between 200 and 1,000 workers at any point in time during the next six months,” said Walker. “The projects are very labor intensive, they are done with Afghan methods, Afghan technology and Afghan equipment.”

USAID went to the Kajaki elder council in order to have locals decide who works on the projects and who gets the contracts.

“It’s a major step because we got the local representatives of the people involved in it, so the community has more of a buy-in than they do with a lot of other projects,” said Walker, 29, of Poquoson, Va.

The workers are starting with simple tasks like digging ditches and pushing wheelbarrows, said Walker, but as their skills grow, they’ll move to more complex tasks like brick laying, plumbing and electrical work.

“By the end of these projects, it’s likely workers will have a trade skill, which is very good for this area because there is not a lot of human capital,” said Walker.

The projects will provide more than infrastructure and skill; they give the people something to be proud of, and help lend credibility to the Afghan government, said Capt. Blaise T. McFadden, advisor with the Afghan Pakistan Hand Program, 1st Battalion, 8 Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 6.

“The people choose these projects, choose to live the life with the benefits from these projects and choose to live with the government that provides these projects,” said McFadden, 31, from Seattle.

Walker adds the projects give Afghans a glimpse of what life can be like through cooperation with the government.

“It symbolizes the first real demonstration of the government working for them and providing services,” said Walker. “This clinic has been dormant for six years now, since the Taliban drove out the government the last time. This is the government coming back and preparing to offer a better choice than the Taliban.”

McFadden says the desired long-term effect beyond government credibility is education.

“Education is going to be the lasting thing that pulls Kajaki and Afghanistan out of the depression they’ve been in,” he said.

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