

Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

Case Study Series

**Factors Influencing Decisions to Use  
Child Labour:**

**A Case Study of Poor Households in  
Rural Badakhshan**



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## **About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit**

The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is an independent research organisation headquartered in Kabul. AREU's mission is to conduct high-quality research that informs and influences policy and practice. AREU also actively promotes a culture of research and learning by strengthening analytical capacity in Afghanistan and facilitating reflection and debate. Fundamental to AREU's vision is that its work should improve Afghan lives.

AREU was established in 2002 by the assistance community working in Afghanistan. Its board of directors includes representatives from donors, the UN and other multilateral agencies, and NGOs. AREU has recently received funding from: the European Commission; the governments of Denmark (DANIDA), the United Kingdom (DFID), Switzerland (SDC), Norway and Sweden (SIDA); the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); the Government of Afghanistan's Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock; the World Bank; UNICEF; the Aga Khan Foundation; and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Funding for this project was provided by UNICEF and the Child Rights Consortium (CRC).

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## Acronyms

CL	child labour
CFA	Child Fund Afghanistan
GTZ	German Technical Corporation
NCL	non-child labour
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
CDC	Community Development Council
ACTED	Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development
CHW	Community Health Worker
PEP	Poppy Elimination Programme

## Glossary

<i>ailaq</i>	mountain pasture
<i>Afs</i>	official Afghan currency; approximately 50 <i>Afs</i> = US\$1
<i>chopan</i>	shepherd
<i>daia</i>	traditional midwife(s)
<i>gilam</i>	flat-weave rug
<i>Jamiat-i-Islami</i>	a political party
<i>jerib</i>	approximately one-half acre or one-fifth hectare
<i>jinn</i>	spirit
<i>qomandan</i>	military commander
<i>lalmi</i>	rain-fed (agricultural field)
<i>mui-safed</i>	“white-hair” or elder
<i>muzdur-kari</i> or <i>muzduri</i>	casual labour; wage labour; daily labour
<i>mullah</i>	religious leader
<i>qalyn</i>	bride price
<i>raqsa</i>	flat-weave floor cloth off of which meals are eaten
<i>ser</i>	14 kgs (one Faizabad <i>ser</i> = two Kabul <i>ser</i> )
<i>shura</i>	village council
<i>tariok</i>	opium
<i>zakat</i>	charity, tithing

## Executive Summary

This case study is the second in a three-part series examining household decision making on the use of child labour in urban and rural Afghanistan. In contrast to the other two studies in the series, which were conducted in urban areas of Afghanistan, the setting for this research is an isolated village in the northern province of Badakhshan. Through an in-depth analysis of poor rural households – some that send their children to work and others that do not – this case study explores factors beyond poverty in relation to the complex phenomenon of child labour.

This AREU research, supported by funding from UNICEF and the Child Rights Consortium (CRC), informs the ongoing efforts of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD) to promote more secure livelihoods throughout the country and to address the many factors that lead Afghan households to depend on child labour. A subsequent AREU paper will make recommendations for reducing child labour and its risks based on a synthesis of the findings from the case studies in Kabul, Badakhshan and Herat.

In this case study, the term “child labour” is used to refer to children’s work activities (both paid and unpaid) across all levels of hazard and risk. This includes: unpaid domestic tasks; labour in a family enterprise; unpaid work conducted outside the household (such as collecting firewood); and paid work outside the household, whether remunerated in cash or in kind. This work may or may not be combined with school-based education. In this research, child labourers are defined as people aged 14 and under, working in any context (with or without pay, in or outside their home) and those aged 15-18 working in more hazardous occupations. This study does not focus on the most dangerous forms of child labour, however, such as high-risk sex work, trafficking and smuggling. Rather, it is designed to explore the numerous everyday forms of child labour in a village setting and how rural households compare options when making decisions about which of their children will work and what activities they will perform.

This case study was conducted in a rural Badakhshan village named Panj Ko during late autumn in 2007. The small qualitative sample comprises ten poor households, of which seven use child labour and three do not. The study includes in-depth discussions with the parents and children of these households; these provide detailed information about household and community dynamics and focus on decisions that pertain to child labour. This qualitative approach complements a number of other quantitative survey-based studies of child labour in Afghanistan and enables examination of a variety of economic and social factors involved in complex decision-making processes.

## Key findings

- **Economic insecurity, uncertainty about crop yields (due to drought) and the village’s lack of non-farm employment options negatively impact all of the poor households in this study – both those that use child labour and those that do not.** This demonstrates that economic insecurity is a necessary but insufficient condition for child labour in Panj Ko.
- **Households in this geographically isolated village have extensive social and economic links with the provincial capital, Faizabad, despite the fact that travel between the two locations takes a half day by donkey, foot or bus.** Occasionally, men and boys commute to the city for wage labour and boys travel there to sell firewood in the bazaar.

- **All of the poor households interviewed are in considerable debt; they are also supported by extensive local social networks.** Credit sources include relatives, neighbours, friends and shopkeepers. This suggests that indebtedness is also a necessary but insufficient factor in decisions concerning the use of child labour.
- **The absence, illness or death of a male earner in a poor village household activates the strong local social support system,** which includes: village elders, the *shura* (village council), close relatives, neighbours and friends who provide both emotional and material support. In some of these cases, women and children must subsequently find work. There are other poor households in which the male earner is present and active, however, that nonetheless use child labour.
- **The combined elementary and middle school (first through ninth grades) for boys and girls in Panj Ko is remarkably successful.** This is partially due to sociopolitical reasons, such as the strong support of the village leaders. Parents and children are pleased with the quality of education, and parents willingly contribute monthly fees to help support the non-local teachers who must live at the school. Teachers regularly assign homework and provide feedback on students' progress that is welcomed by households.
- **The village school is very supportive of households in which children must combine work and schooling;** for example, teachers can make special arrangements for short absences and allow students to make up missed work. Teachers (many of whom are villagers themselves) know the community intimately and strongly discourage households from completely withdrawing their children from school in order to work.
- **Children sampled in this study exhibited gender-specific types of work, which allow girls to combine work and schooling where boys cannot.** Girls, whose labour is in close proximity to the village, can attend school in the morning and work in the afternoons. In contrast, because boys' work takes them far into the mountains or to distant Faizabad, they cannot combine work and schooling.
- **Almost all of the school-age boys and girls in the total sample of ten households are enrolled in the village school,** which is a testament to the local school's success.
- **For two of the case study households in which fathers had recently passed away, community leaders and the children's school teachers were the primary decision-makers regarding child labour;** family members only played secondary roles in these decision-making processes. In the first case, the household was in extensive debt to other community members; in the second, a son assumed the contracted task of village shepherd that his deceased father had held. In both instances, community-based decisions were deemed necessary to maintain village harmony.
- **Fulfilment of traditional ritual obligations can result in child labour.** In one household, an elder son had to remain at home for a year to greet the many guests who came to offer condolences for his father's death. Community leaders and teachers made the decision to withdraw his younger brother from the fifth grade so that he could work to support the household.
- **Eldest sons are the children most likely to be called upon to work;** elder girls may work in the absence of a male child of suitable age.

- **Village children currently engaged in child labour have little input into decisions about their work and often feel compelled to work in order to support their poor households.** Children's impressions of their work range from acceptance and some degree of pride to utter dislike and despair.
- **Most child labourers sampled in this study do not work under conditions that meet the requirements of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child or the Afghanistan Labour Code.** Long work hours (especially for boys), difficult physical labour (for both boys and girls) and underage employment are common. Furthermore, parents and children both perceive a number of work-related risks and hazards. For both boys and girls, this includes fear of attacks by wild animals or *jinn* (spirits) as well as fear of falling in the mountains (resulting in injury or death). Additional concerns for boys include fear of robbery and being beaten by employers; for girls, fear of gossip and sexual harassment is common.
- **Children involved in child labour exhibit a high degree of psychological stress regarding their work.** This is especially evident among those withdrawn from school after prolonged study and those living with relatives as orphans. Boys' anxiety was focused on the physical risks of their labour, including accidents and attacks occurring during work away from the village. Girls repeatedly expressed stress related to the prospect of encountering sexual harassment while working outside of their households.
- **In spite of the negative aspects of child labour, parents and children also note some positive results, including:** providing the child with a sense of responsibility; increasing an individual's influence within the household or community; building self-esteem and confidence in personal interactions; promoting numeracy skill development; and furnishing children with an opportunity to socialise with their peers.
- **Child labour is associated with a number of negative and positive social sanctions in this socially close-knit and physically compact village,** where villagers attribute a great deal of importance to "what people will say." There is much variation among households in this regard. For example, a mother's reputation can be enhanced if her children work and are seen by others to take responsibility. In another case, the reputation of a household's patron might be tarnished if other villagers see that children in his client's household have to work, implying that the patron is not supporting his client well.
- **Non-child labour households share some common general characteristics, including:** parents that have more intensive and varied work activities; greater exposure to the outside world (within Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan); more frequent references to positive role models who have found economic success through education; and greater consideration of the opinions and desires of their children concerning school and work.
- **All households included in this study clearly recognise the importance of schooling for both sons and daughters.** They consider education a means by which their children will find valuable employment and related economic security. This is true for both child labour and non-child labour households in spite of the substantial insecurity inherent in the livelihoods of all Panj Ko residents.

- **Parents and children in Panj Ko have common aspirations for the children to enter professions, such as teaching and medicine, that enable the child to return to the village to work.** Apprenticeships in vocations such as masonry, carpentry and mechanics are also viewed as desirable for and by some boys. These are not considered practical options, however, because they do not provide regular wages.
- **There is a striking lack of options in Panj Ko, not only in higher education (above ninth grade) but also in subsequent viable on-farm and non-farm employment.** Government efforts to improve education and create more job opportunities must be increased and perfected in order to ensure that rural Afghans' investments in education result in successful employment and that their optimistic aspirations for their children are realised.

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study is to advance in-depth understanding of decision-making processes that pertain to child labour in rural Badakhshan. This is one of three cases in a larger comparative study of child labour in Afghanistan, which also includes case studies from the capital city of Kabul and the western city of Herat (including the border area of Islam Qala).<sup>1</sup> The intent of the project is to inform the ongoing efforts by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD) to address the numerous factors that lead households to depend on child labour and to promote more secure livelihoods throughout the country. Although this report does not make specific recommendations for reducing child labour and its risks, a subsequent AREU study will offer recommendations based on a synthesis of the findings from this series of case studies on child labour in Kabul, Badakhshan and Herat.

In recent years, a number of valuable quantitative surveys have addressed child labour in various urban centres and border towns of Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup> To date, however, there has been little systematic analysis of child labour in rural Afghanistan. This case study of a village in Badakhshan is designed to help fill that gap in the research. Also, whereas most previous research on this topic is based on quantitative, survey-based approaches that use large random samples, this research analyses a small sample of rural households in detail. It explores the complex processes of child labour-related decision-making through in-depth conversations with both parents and children. The qualitative findings of this study complement the quantitative data of earlier reports.

In this study, the term “child labour” refers to children’s work activities, whether paid or unpaid, across all levels of risks and hazards. This includes: unpaid domestic tasks; labour in a family enterprise; unpaid work conducted outside the household; and paid work outside the household, whether remunerated in cash or kind. This work may or may not be done in combination with school-based education. The authors define child labourers as people aged 14 and under working in any context (with or without pay, in or outside their home), and those aged 15-18 working in more hazardous occupations. This study does not focus on the most dangerous forms of child labour, however, such as sex work, trafficking, and smuggling.<sup>3</sup> Rather, it seeks to understand the numerous everyday forms of child labour in a village setting, focusing on how rural households compare options and make decisions about which of their children will work and how.

Since 1994, Afghanistan has been a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which protects children from economic exploitation, hazardous work and work that might interfere with schooling. In addition, the recently updated Afghan

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<sup>1</sup> This AREU Case Study Series is entitled *Factors Influencing Decisions to Use Child Labour*. The first instalment, “A Case Study of Poor Households in Kabul,” by Paula Kantor and Anastasiya Hozyainova, was published in April 2008; the study of child labour in Herat, by Amanda Sim and Marie-Louise Høilund-Carlsen, to be published in August 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Recent works include: Reinhard Fichtl, “Needs Assessment of Children Working in the Streets of Kabul” (Kabul: Swiss Foundation of Terre des Homes, ASCHIANA Street Children Project and Central Statistics Office of Afghanistan, 2002); “Street and Working Children Situation in Torkham, Afghanistan” (Terre des Hommes, 2006); “An Overview on Situation of Child Labour in Afghanistan,” (Kabul: Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2006). Earlier works include: “Survey of Working Children: Jalalabad, Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan” (Islamic Relief Agency and UNICEF, 1996); Cindy Dubble, “Needs Assessment of Working Children in Mazar-i-Sharif” (UNICEF, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> For further information on human trafficking in the Afghan context see “Trafficking in Persons; An Analysis of Afghanistan” (Kabul: International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2003).

Labour Code now defines the legal working age as 18; it also allows light, non-hazardous work for children ages 15-18. Recruiting children under the age of 18 for hazardous work is prohibited, and the legal work week for child workers aged 15-18 is less than that for adults (35 hours rather than 40). Afghanistan currently lacks the institutional means to implement these legislative commitments, however, and UNICEF recently estimated that up to 30 percent of primary school age children must work to support their families.<sup>4</sup>

This case study examines the rural livelihoods of poor villagers in the northern province of Badakhshan, focusing specifically on the role of child labour in the household and the community. To survive in this precarious mountain environment, families have developed complex livelihoods strategies involving both farm-based and off-farm activities. This research presents a detailed examination of complex decision-making processes and family dynamics, in an effort to better understand why some poor households decide that their children should work while others do not. The study also includes a detailed review of the village children's various labour experiences and working conditions. Most villagers send their sons and daughters to the large primary (elementary and middle) school in the community; some working children are able to attend school, but a few of the children surveyed work exclusively. This research ascertains various costs and benefits involved in school and work as interpreted by both parents and children as well as the villagers' aspirations for the future.

Although this research considers poverty to be a central cause of child labour in Afghanistan, it asserts that several additional factors are involved in this complex phenomenon. Thus, a central objective of this case study is to look beyond the idea that poverty is the sole determinant of child labour and to consider other possible causal factors. Naila Kabeer, author of "Deprivation, Discrimination and Delivery: Competing Explanations for Child Labour and Educational Failure in South Asia," suggests that research of this nature is necessary in order "to understand in greater detail how synergies between economic and social [factors] operate at the micro-level and what lessons can be incorporated into wider policy efforts."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Sikandar Khan, UNICEF Deputy Representative for Afghanistan, (UNAMA Press Conference, February 2008.)

<sup>5</sup> Naila Kabeer, "Deprivation, Discrimination and Delivery: Competing Explanations for Child Labour and Educational Failure in South Asia" (IDS Working Paper 135, May 2001.)

## 2. Methodology

As a qualitative case study, this research consists of open-ended interviews within a small sample of households selected because they meet particular criteria. This approach differs from quantitative research, which is based on a large random sample. Rather than using an inflexible interview format with coded responses, the research is based on open-ended questions; the research team analysed the detailed answers to these questions for common themes or qualities. These selection criteria and research practices are outlined with greater detail in the section that follows.

In fall 2007, the AREU field research team travelled from Kabul to Faizabad (the provincial capital) to begin conducting research in rural Badakhshan. There, the research team (which consisted of both men and women) hired two local women who were familiar with the region and the local dialect.<sup>6</sup> The team then met with representatives of the provincial governor and obtained district-level contacts and permission to conduct the study in Badakhshan.

The research team considered several factors in selecting a village for the case study. First, the focal village needed to be large enough to exhibit a diverse range of livelihood strategies. Second, the village needed to have at least a primary school in the community. This was to ensure that the local households had a choice between having their children: attend school without working; combine school and work; or work without attending school. A number of sources in Faizabad assisted the research team in identifying a suitable research site, including local provincial governmental authorities and a variety of aid agencies.<sup>7</sup>

The village of Panj Ko, in the district of Yaftal-i-Sufla, was chosen because it met the aforementioned criteria.<sup>8</sup> The village had the added advantage of being relatively close to Faizabad, allowing the research team to travel to and from Panj Ko daily. The team carried out the fieldwork during a four-week period in November, just before snowstorms began to isolate the mountain community for the winter.

The major techniques used in the field research were participant observation, focus group discussions and in-depth conversations. In addition to numerous casual walks through Panj Ko, the male members of the research team conducted an initial group discussion with members (N = 23) of the local male *shura* and Community Development Council (CDC); this group included several male teachers from the local school.<sup>9</sup>

The research team also held a conversation with the *qomandan*, the leader of the community. Female team members carried out similar focus group with women from the village, including participants in the community's literacy class and local *daia* (traditional

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<sup>6</sup> These local research assistants were hired with assistance from Child Fund Afghanistan (CFA) and Oxfam.

<sup>7</sup> Suggestions for field sites were obtained from Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), Alternative Knowledge Development Network (AKDN), Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), CFA and UNICEF. During this study, the research team also contacted Child Protection Action Network (CPAN), WFP, Poppy Elimination Programme (PEP) and Nejat.

<sup>8</sup> Names of people and (some) places in this case study have been changed to protect the anonymity of the participants. Panj Ko is a pseudonym for the rural Badakhshan village studied in this research.

<sup>9</sup> The *shura* is the traditional village council. The Community Development Council (CDC) has been formed in recent years with outside guidance by aid agencies participating in the National Solidarity Programme (NSP). The membership of these councils overlaps extensively in Panj Ko, and residents simply refer to the organization as the *shura*.

birth attendants). The team also held discussions with the two female teachers from Panj Ko school and the local female Community Health Worker (CHW). In general, these conversations dealt with the village economy, prevalent livelihoods, community facilities, education and health-related issues, and how village children spend their time.

For the study, the team selected specific households in Panj Ko based upon their socioeconomic status, livelihood strategies, degree of reliance on child labour and the age and gender of the household child selected by the team as a research focus.<sup>10</sup> Much of this information about possible respondent households was obtained through the previously mentioned group discussions or through informal conversations with households that the team met during the early days of the field work.

To test the assumption that poverty is the sole reason for child labour, all of the households included in this purposive sample are poor;<sup>11</sup> some of these use child labour but others do not. This methodology explores factors beyond poverty that may influence decisions about child labour. The ten households selected for this study fall into three major categories:

Poor households with a focal child who works but does not attend school ( $n = 4$ )

Poor households with a focal child who both works and attends school ( $n = 3$ )

Poor households in which *all* children attend school and do not work ( $n = 3$ )

To ensure that the respondents correspond to the definition of child labour used by the International Labour Organization (ILO), the age of each focal child is between nine and 14 years of age, or up to 18 years of age if their work is particularly hazardous.<sup>12,13</sup> Households were selected with the desire that the sample represent a variety of types of child labour and a variety of locations within the village. The team also worked to balance the number of boys and girls selected as focal children.

Several detailed interview guides were developed for this study, designed to explore the decision-making processes in households regarding their use of child labour. These discussions were designed to uncover the context in which households make decisions about whether or not to use child labour, including the events and experiences occurring in the household at the time when they decided to begin using child labour. A team of two men and a team of two women field researchers visited the male and female members (respectively) of each participating household and discussed: the household's livelihood history, assets held, major events experienced in recent years, attitudes towards formal education and plans for the future. These discussions were usually (but not always) held with the fathers and mothers of the household by the gender-appropriate research team.<sup>14</sup> The research team applied this interview framework uniformly to all households participating in the study, including both CL and NCL households.

The research team then visited CL households for a second time, holding parental discussions that focused on the roles and responsibilities of the focal child labourer in the context of the household, the household's coping mechanisms and the child's specific contributions to the household's livelihood strategies. Subsequently, the research team

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<sup>10</sup> Children selected by the research team for focus in this study are referred to hereafter as a "focal child."

<sup>11</sup> See Box 2 (on page 10) for more details about this village-based classification of poor households.

<sup>12</sup> *Minimum Age Convention* (ILO Convention no. 138), 1973.

<sup>13</sup> *Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour* (ILO Convention no. 182), 1999.

<sup>14</sup> Under ideal circumstances, these interviews would have been conducted in private. Often, however, other family members and/or neighbours were present (especially in the case of female respondents).

held an in-depth conversation with the focal child designed to explore the child's perspective on his or her roles in the household and to obtain a description of the child's working conditions.<sup>15</sup>

Individual interview sessions typically lasted one to two hours, which was a considerable amount of time for busy villagers (male or female) to provide to the field teams.<sup>16</sup> While one fieldworker asked open-ended questions and kept the conversation going smoothly, the second team member took extensive field notes on the interview. This allowed the team to collect highly detailed qualitative information. After each conversation, the team prepared lengthy field reports on each interview. They compiled information that pertained to the complex household social dynamics and the decision-making processes regarding education and child labour. This methodological approach allowed the research team to reliably and extensively explore the livelihoods of poor rural villagers in Badakhshan and to gather focused and detailed information on household decisions regarding the use of child labour.

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<sup>15</sup> Interviews with women and children were conducted primarily in their homes; those with men often took place in the neighbourhood mosque or guestroom. Conducting fieldwork focused on children in Afghanistan poses some particular challenges. Whenever possible, team members spoke with the boys and girls in private, after obtaining parental agreement. The researchers were cautious when asking a child about his or her work experiences due to the possibility of shame or abuse associated with some of the types of child labour. During the interviews, the interviewers allowed the children to share any uncomfortable or painful moments but did not pursue the subject if they saw that child was reluctant.

<sup>16</sup> Despite the detailed introductions given by the field team on the information-gathering purpose of this research about child labour, it was often difficult to achieve a rapport with respondents, who often said they did not have time to speak with the research teams. Furthermore, the simultaneous arrival of the Poppy Elimination Programme in Faizabad led some villagers to question if there was a possible link between this project and that, increasing their reluctance to participate in interviews.

## 3. The Research Setting

### 3.1 The village location and composition

Panj Ko is located in the district of Yaftal-i-Sufla, approximately 25 km from Faizabad (the provincial capital of Badakhshan).<sup>17</sup> Travel from Panj Ko to Faizabad usually takes more than three hours by donkey (the villagers' primary means of transport) or by foot; by jeep, the trip takes one hour. A small dirt road originates in the village and winds through the surrounding mountains, finally intersecting with a larger unpaved road that eventually leads to the city. Villagers usually walk for an hour to reach the main road and wait for a bus ride to the city that costs ten *Afs* in each direction. If a villager needs to rent a jeep for health emergencies, the cost is 100 *Afs* to travel in each direction. Rain and snow severely inhibit the community's contact with the outside world, especially in the winter.

Panj Ko is a relatively large rural community, with approximately 300 households terraced into a valley along the banks of a small river. The majority of the village's residents are Sunni Tajik, with a small minority of Ismaili Shia households. Many of these households are related to one another through extensive kinship ties.

### 3.2 Recent history and current leadership

During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, foreign troops were stationed in Faizabad, and the surrounding rural region of Badakhshan was the site of sporadic fighting; this fighting continued during the rule of Najibullah (1986-1992).<sup>18</sup> During the fighting, Panj Ko was heavily bombarded by air strikes in which the lower part of the village was completely destroyed. At this time, a number of households left the community to live with relatives in surrounding villages as internally displaced persons. During the 1990s, the village was on the frontline of the fighting against the Taliban, and portions of the population once again departed for nearby communities. Some fled to Iran and (to a lesser extent) Pakistan, only to return when the Taliban were defeated in 2001.

At present, as in previous decades, the residents of Panj Ko are staunch supporters of Burhanuddin Rabbani, his *Jamiat-i-Islami* party and the National Front.<sup>19</sup> All three of the village's current leaders served as paramilitary commanders for Rabbani during the many years of conflict against the Soviets and the Taliban.

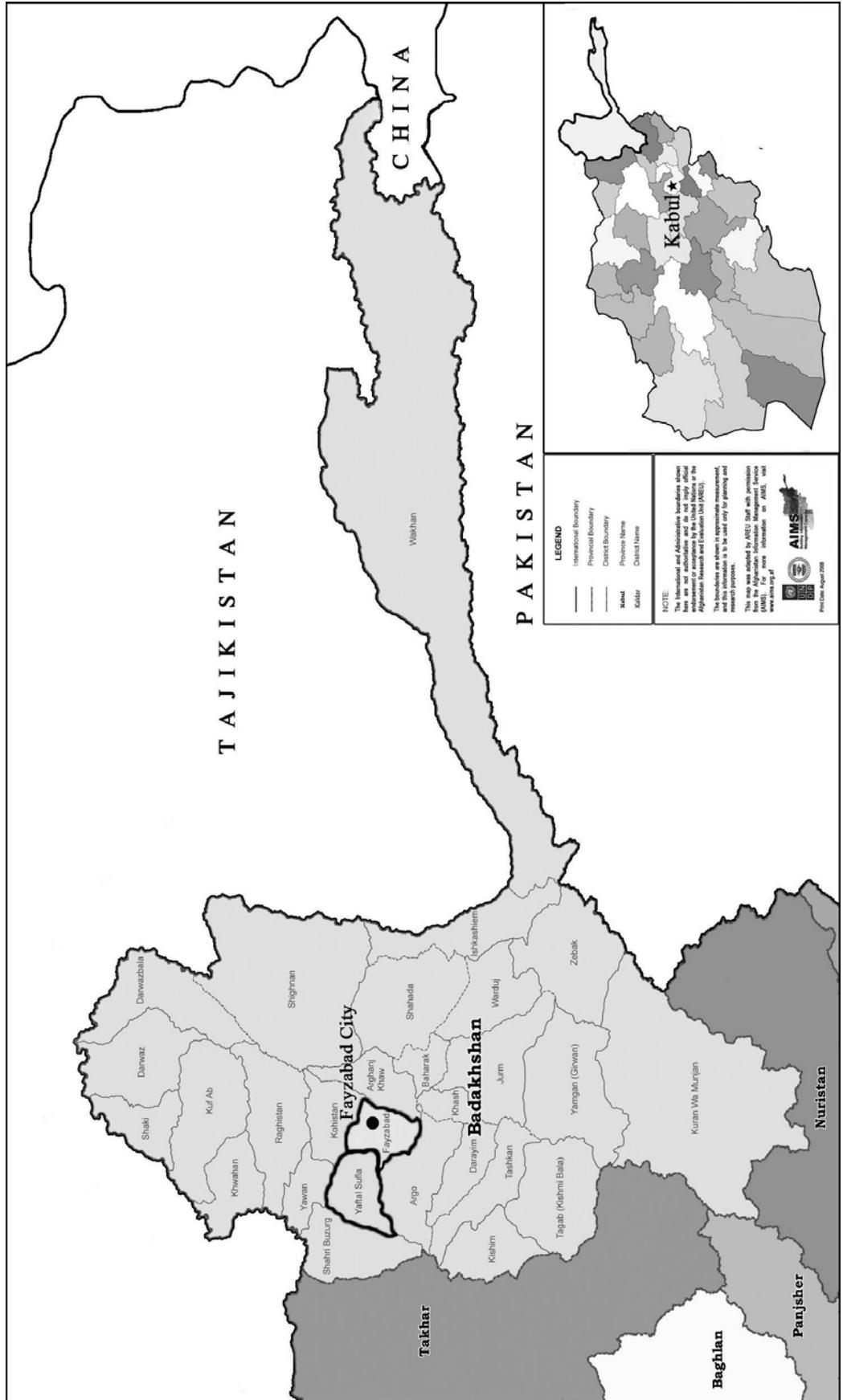
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<sup>17</sup> Faizabad, with a population of 61,057, is the governmental and commercial centre of the province. It is also home to a number of educational and health facilities. *Badakhshan: A Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile: Household Listing 2003-2005*, (Kabul: Central Statistical Office and United Nations Population Fund, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> "Badakhshan," SMU Area Report (Islamabad: Strategic Monitoring Unit Afghanistan, May 2001).

<sup>19</sup> Rabbani is a political leader from Badakhshan who served as President of Afghanistan (1992-1996), prior to the Taliban regime. He is now a member of the Afghan National Parliament, and represents the opposition National Front. In the early 1990s, a daughter from one of the households of Panj Ko married into Rabbani's family.

Map of Badakhshan Province with district-level divisions



Panj Ko's senior commander, or *qomandan*,<sup>20</sup> is currently the head of the village *shura* and Community Development Council (CDC), which was set up under the National Solidarity Programme (NSP). He has valuable links with other important commanders in Faizabad and in the surrounding area. He is also the principal of the local school. The village *shura* and Community Development Council, which also includes a number of traditional elders (*muhsafed*) of Panj Ko arbitrates the major disputes and decisions in the community including some cases that involve child labour.

Haji Zahir, a successful native son of Panj Ko, is another important community leader; since he has lived in Pakistan for decades, he is considered a leader *in absentia*. Haji Zahir is a wealthy carpet dealer with trading offices in Peshawar and Kabul. Each year he sends large sums of *zakat*<sup>21</sup> to the villagers, which are distributed by the *qomandan* according to a list of deserving households. These sums have ranged from 1,000 to 5,000 *Afs* per household; in some cases, Haji Zahir has also provided scholarships allowing village boys to study in either Kabul or Peshawar. Haji Zahir also initiated the construction and repair of the village road prior to the involvement of the National Solidarity Program (NSP), and he continues to provide funds for mosque repairs.

#### Box 1: Some Basic Characteristics of the Village of Panj Ko

<b>Location:</b>	Badakhshan Province, Yaftal-i-Sufila District; 25 km from the provincial capital, Faizabad
<b>Population:</b>	Approximately 300 households
<b>Ethnicity:</b>	Tajik
<b>Leadership:</b>	Senior commander and <i>shura</i> (village council), <i>Jamiat-i-Islami</i> party
<b>Livelihoods:</b>	Agriculture (crops and livestock); non-farm work in village and Faizabad
<b>School:</b>	School (first through ninth grades) for both boys and girls; 14 male teachers and two female teachers
<b>Health:</b>	Male and female CHWs in village; nearest clinic a few hours' walk away
<b>Water Sources:</b>	Two springs near village, river
<b>Electricity:</b>	None
<b>Outside Support:</b>	Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED): road building German Technical Corporation (GTZ) and CFA: water and sanitation WFP: Food for Education (FFE) WHO: female literacy course Care of Afghan Families (CAF)/ Medical Relief Emergency International (MERLIN): CHW training

<sup>20</sup> The *qomandan*, the richest man in the village, is respected both for his deeds in war and for his personality. A "self-made man," he was elected by the community to represent the village in Faizabad and is seen as a competent mediator in the community's internal and external disputes. The *qomandan* is also credited by the villagers with the construction of the new school, the rebuilding of the local mosque and the successful new sanitation project.

<sup>21</sup> Alms for the poor, a central pillar of Islamic faith.

### 3.3 Livelihoods

Panj Ko's economy is largely subsistence-based, and village livelihoods typically consist of agriculture, livestock raising or non-farm activities such as casual labour, wage labour and home-based handicrafts.<sup>22</sup> Most households practice a combination of these livelihoods, using complex strategies to subsist in an insecure and seasonally changing environment. All able-bodied members of the household (both adults and children) take part in these activities to the best of their abilities. Some households, however, use child labour to a greater degree than others. In recent years, due to drought and other reasons, *male* villagers (both men and boys) have increasingly chosen to participate in the non-farming informal economy in Faizabad.<sup>23</sup>

#### *Agriculture*

The cultivated land surrounding Panj Ko is *jalmi* (rainfed). Due to droughts in recent years,<sup>24</sup> however, yields from these fields are small and unreliable. The village's major crop is wheat (which is the customary unit of exchange or payment in Panj Ko) along with barley, corn and pulses. Villagers also cultivate oilseeds – such as *zigher* (linseed), *kunjit* (sesame) and sunflowers—for home consumption. The husks of these seeds are used as fodder for cows and donkeys. Some households have small gardens near their homes in which they grow potatoes, onions, tomatoes, squash, melons and various other fruits and vegetables. There are also a few small orchards near the river in which pomegranate, apricot, plum and cherry trees grow. The above-listed produce is uniformly used for local household consumption, rather than as a cash crop. Young children of all households (both boys and girls) actively assist with both farm and off-farm work.

The research team conducted its fieldwork in November, during a period in the agricultural cycle when farmers were waiting impatiently to see how much fall rainfall would occur. This would inform their decisions about which crops to sow before the winter snows arrived. For example, wheat requires more water than opium poppies (*tariok*), which are also a major crop in Badakhshan.<sup>25</sup>

#### *Livestock raising*

Sheep and goats comprise the majority of the village's domestic animals; cows and donkeys are also prevalent, and most households have some poultry.<sup>26</sup> Livestock ownership varies

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<sup>22</sup> This section sets forth only some basic economic parameters of livelihoods, with more detailed information about specific household strategies vis-à-vis child labour included in later sections.

<sup>23</sup> ACTED (an NSP Facilitating Partner) staff familiar with Panj Ko estimate the following percentages for village livelihoods: 60 percent agriculture, 30 percent livestock raising and 10 percent casual labour, wage labour and home-based handicrafts. This case study, however, suggests that ACTED staff have underestimated the importance of casual and wage labour.

<sup>24</sup> This drought has lasted for years, with some small improvements in recent seasons. At the time of writing, however, the results of the heavy snows of the winter of 2007-08 were as yet unknown.

<sup>25</sup> Although not central to our research, the team did explore the possible roles that child labour might play in *tariok* production. This, however, proved to be a very sensitive topic of conversation. In focus groups, villagers noted that opium poppies "had been grown in the past, but no more;" the government would now destroy the crops, which are considered *haram* (religiously forbidden). It is not known what role, if any, the village leaders plays in *tariok*-related regional networks. For further discussion on child labour and opium production, see page 28.

<sup>26</sup> The village diet, which varies among households according to their economic standing, is comprised primarily of dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt, and butter) and bread. Eggs are also common, and villagers may use them to barter or exchange for foodstuffs between households. Meat is only very infrequently consumed by the

considerably according to the economic standing of the given household, and the children of a household are the primary shepherds of its livestock. Richer households may also choose to pool their animals with others and send them for grazing to mountain pastures (*ailaq*) with a hired village shepherd (*chopan*). Children are generally expected to gather and store fodder for these animals, a task that is especially important during the long winter months. Livestock also provide valuable dung, which children collect from the fields and mountains; women and girls then shape the dung into cakes for use as fuel.<sup>27</sup>

During the male and female focus group discussions, villagers set forth the following guidelines for judging the economic standing of a local household based on its agricultural and livestock assets. These local definitions of wealth and poverty, which are detailed in Box 2, allowed the research team to distinguish and select poor households for inclusion in this study sample.

**Box 2: Local definitions for household economic status in Panj Ko**

<b>Rich Households:</b>	20 <i>jerib</i> or more of land 15 or more sheep and/or goats 4 or more cows
<b>Poor Households</b>	2 <i>jerib</i> of land or less, or landless 1 cow or donkey 2-3 sheep Poultry

***Casual and daily wage labour***

Due to drought, poor yields, small landholdings, limited assets, and a variety of other factors (which will be discussed later in this case study), economic insecurity is commonplace for many residents of Panj Ko, who cannot rely on their own household production alone for survival.

Under these circumstances, men and boys in many households are forced to seek irregular labour<sup>28</sup> either within the village or in Faizabad. This work may either be agriculture-related or associated with construction and other non-farm work. In recent years, NSP and nongovernmental organization (NGO) projects (such as the construction of the village road and the water sanitation system) have periodically provided additional local employment opportunities. Poor women and girls may also do a variety of chores for other households. None of these activities are long-term, however, which results in individuals continually looking for future work.

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poor, perhaps only at wedding celebrations. Rice, cooking oil, tea, sugar and other foodstuffs are not available locally but are purchased in Faizabad.

<sup>27</sup> Later sections of this case study detail these daily roles for boys' and girls' in specific households.

<sup>28</sup> A variety of potentially overlapping terms are used for this irregular labour: *muzdur-kari* or *muzduri* (casual labour, wage labour or daily labour); *kharta* (casual agricultural work for others); and *nesfkari* (sharecropping). In some cases the individual is paid in cash or kind when a short-term specific task is completed. In other cases, payment is not made until the end of the season. More details are provided in later discussion of specific household livelihoods and coping strategies.

### *Other income-generation options*

In addition to the aforementioned strategies, there are a few other activities that male and female members of a household may undertake in their attempts to generate much-needed income. Boys often gather firewood and brush from the mountainsides, both for daily home consumption and for sale in the Faizabad bazaar (to which they travel by donkey).<sup>29</sup> Women and girls from poor households may also undertake small-scale, home-based income generation activities. These are usually contracted between individuals on irregular, one-time bases. For example, women may weave colourful, flat-weave rugs (*gilam*) or construct cooking areas and ovens from mud for others. Payment for these activities is most often in kind. Young girls may occupy their time making lace embroidery (*latabofi*) for shawls or handkerchiefs (*safedози*). This is most often for their own dowry (*jehez*) but is also occasionally for sale to neighbours or other villagers on an informal basis.

Respondents (including men, women, and children) often voiced the complaint that “there’s no work in the village” or that “there’s nothing for us to do here.” Indeed, Panj Ko suffers from a severe lack of local capital and markets. The community has no bazaar; there are approximately ten small shops scattered throughout the village. These shops sell household supplies such as matches, soap and biscuits; one shop employs child labour. In addition, a few local carpenters and masons work as skilled labourers, usually part-time, either within the village or (more frequently) in Faizabad. The village also contains two water-powered flour mills (*asiyab*), five animal-powered oil presses and a nearby brick-making facility; these employ a handful of adult males.

## **3.4 Community facilities and sources of outside support**

Mountain springs provide drinking water for the community, which is obtained (usually by children) from two pumps in the community. CFA has recently constructed a water reservoir, and GTZ is now implementing a sanitation project that involves local labour (both men and boys) in work such as laying pipes and building a cement reservoir. The community has no electricity, and oil lamps are the common light source. Wealthy villagers may rent generators from Faizabad for weddings and other events, and a few well-to-do men own cell phones (especially those who frequently work in Faizabad).

Since the establishment of the NSP, ACTED has been the NSP Facilitating Partner for activities in the Panj Ko region. Their primary project has been to coordinate construction of the main road, and repair of the smaller road that leads to the village. The village greatly appreciates this endeavour, because it employs local labour (men and boys) with cash remuneration. Prior to the NSP, the road construction was financed by the community’s benefactor, Haji Zahir.

### *Education*

Haji Zahir has also recently provided local labour and financing to renovate Panj Ko’s centrally located mosque. The village *shura* has hired a *mullah* who teaches boys and young girls the Holy Quran, and some villagers refer to this as a madrassah. In addition, there are a few religion-literate women in the community who teach young children and elder girls the Holy Quran in their homes. Villagers most commonly undertake religious study in the winter months during children’s vacation from government school. The large government

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<sup>29</sup> The fuel needs of a growing population (along with the marketing of forest products, increased agriculture and overgrazing) have resulted in the severe deforestation of the entire region. For more information, see: “Badakhshan,” SMU Area Report (Islamabad: Strategic Monitoring Unit Afghanistan, May 2001).

school in Panj Ko is located directly across the road from the mosque; approximately 1,200 students (boys and girls) are enrolled there in first through ninth grades. The school's students come both from Panj Ko and from the surrounding catchment area of neighbouring villages. The school was originally established in 1992<sup>30</sup> and enlarged in 2000. In 2006, community contributions and World Bank funding supported the construction of a cement building with local labour; the school now contains nine classrooms.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to the principal (who is also the village's *qomandan*), the school employs a total of 14 male teachers and two female teachers. The community's boys and girls are well represented in the student body.<sup>32</sup> According to villagers, all grades are separated by gender except for ninth grade (which has too few students for separate classes). Not all of the male teachers are from Panj Ko; some come from other districts of Badakhshan and reside at the school. A monthly fee is collected from each student to pay for teachers' food and other supplies.<sup>33</sup> The two women teachers are not from Panj Ko; both come from Faizabad. One has married into the village and the other lives in the village with her uncle and his family.

One advantage of school enrolment in Panj Ko (especially among poor households) has been the WFP Food for Education (FFE) Programme, which distributes foodstuffs to all students. In this programme, each enrolled child (male and female) is given a 50 kg bag of wheat twice annually, and all children receive nutritional biscuits (100 grams) every day. In addition, every female student receives five litres of cooking oil twice a year. Much to the disappointment of parents, however, this WFP food distribution in Panj Ko School has ceased during the past eight months.<sup>34</sup> In recent years, Afghan Aid has also periodically supplied students with pencils, notebooks, and other school supplies.

The *qomandan*, along with many parents, noted that government representatives in Faizabad have promised the community that their school will be enlarged to a high school (tenth through twelfth grades) in the near future. At present, the few boys from Panj Ko who study beyond ninth grade must walk daily to the nearest high school in another community along the main road (a trip that takes one to two hours each way) or rent a room in Faizabad to continue their schooling.

The WHO sponsors a daily women's literacy course in Panj Ko. The two female teachers from the government school conduct the afternoon classes in the home of one of the *shura* members. The course began five to six years ago and is well-attended; some women are even on waiting lists to participate. It appears some of the course's popularity stems from the fact that at the conclusion of the course participants will each receive a 50 kg bag of wheat.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Some individuals noted that the village school was originally a madrassah before the government took it over.

<sup>31</sup> Close political connections with the provincial leadership in Faizabad appear to have been involved in the school's establishment and its ongoing success.

<sup>32</sup> Exact population figures by grade and gender are not available. There do not seem to be any negative sanctions against girls' education (for first through ninth grades) in Panj Ko, and a common response from both men and women was that "everyone sends boys and girls to school here."

<sup>33</sup> These fees cost 10 *Af*s per month from each student in grades 1-3 and 20 *Af*s per month for students in grades four through nine.

<sup>34</sup> Especially intended for vulnerable and food-insecure areas, WFP FFE distribution has been based on data from the National Vulnerability Assessment of 2004. Distribution will not resume until the results from the next assessment are tallied. WFP staff, oral comm., Faizabad, Nov 2007.

<sup>35</sup> This is part of the WFP Food For Training (FFT) Programme.

## Health

The absence of health facilities in Panj Ko is a severely felt need for all villagers (male and female, young and old). The nearest clinic, which provides only basic services, is a few hours away by foot on the main road to Faizabad. For serious illnesses, both patient and family members must make the long and expensive trip to Faizabad. It costs 100 *Afs* or more (in each direction) to rent a vehicle for transporting a sick person, in addition to the costs of doctor fees, medicines and room rental in the city for accompanying relatives. As illustrated in later sections of this case study, an expensive illness can put a poor household deeply in debt. Thus, in the case of a health problem, households usually first turn to home-based treatment using herbs collected from the mountainsides.<sup>36</sup> The household may visit a *mullah* (who is viewed as a healer as well as a religious leader) or consult the local *daia* if the ill person is a woman or child.<sup>37</sup>

Modern medicines such as aspirin are available in the village shops. In addition, two local CHWs (one male and one female) also actively deal with the basic health care of the village. The female CHW listed the following health complaints as being the most prevalent in the community: pneumonia, malaria, malnutrition, skin diseases, leishmaniasis, jaundice, cancer, stroke, heart attacks, tetanus, and high infant and maternal mortality. In addition to an array of basic medicines and first aid supplies, the female CHW also has a variety of contraceptive methods (condoms, pills and injections) on hand, which she says are well-accepted by the villagers.<sup>38</sup>

### 3.5 The village social support system

Residents of Panj Ko receive strong social support from their fellow villagers, many of whom are related by blood or marriage. There are a number of ways in which households use ongoing emotional and material reciprocity to constantly reinforce social networks. Along with frequent informal visits to other households, females may borrow foodstuffs, share *tandur* ovens and occasionally help each other weave a *gilam*. Furthermore, lifecycle events such as births<sup>39</sup> and deaths<sup>40</sup> all call for empathetic visiting by relatives, neighbours, and friends. This is strictly followed and reciprocated among units.

The research team conducted its fieldwork in Panj Ko during the busy fall wedding season, after the harvest and before the snows when villagers (regardless of age and gender) have the time to engage in social activities.<sup>41</sup> When small girls visit a household to extend an

<sup>36</sup> A number of different medicinal plants are found in mountainous Badakhshan. "Afghanistan: A Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile" (Kabul: Central Statistics Office of Afghanistan and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2007), 105.

<sup>37</sup> There are three very active *daia* in Panj Ko. These elderly women were often present in the sample households during discussions and relate that they had participated in a training course in the past. They are paid for each birth in kind, not cash; the payment is usually cloth material or foodstuffs equal to approximately 200-300 *Afs*. There is no set fee, and poor households may not reimburse *daia* at all.

<sup>38</sup> Although an individual should pay the CHW five *Afs* for each treatment, the CHWs relate that this payment is rarely received.

<sup>39</sup> On the seventh day following a birth, village women are invited to the household for the *gawara-shani*, a ceremony in which the newborn is placed in the cradle. Food is prepared for all of the guests, which may cost between 500 and 1000 *Afs*.

<sup>40</sup> Following a death, a household must provide food for guests at the funeral as well as on the third, seventh and fortieth days, and on the first year anniversary. Households frequently incur debts of thousands of *Afs*, not only for foodstuffs but also for cash distributions to funeral attendees at the gravesite (ranging as high as 200-300 *Afs* apiece).

<sup>41</sup> Indeed, it was very difficult for the research team to arrange interviews due to respondents' frequent attendance at numerous weddings, which occurred almost every day during the fieldwork.

invitation to a wedding, the household reciprocates by providing the girls with a small amount of wheat at that time and later brings sweets to the ceremony itself. The cost of a wedding is considerable for all involved. It includes both the dowry (*jehez*) provided by the bride's family<sup>42</sup> and the bride-price (*qalyyn*) provided by the groom's family<sup>43</sup> as well as feasts at both the bride's home and (after one week) the groom's home. These feasts usually include meat and rice, and both households frequently go into considerable debt through foodstuff purchase.<sup>44</sup> Respondents noted that poor villagers may attend simply to have a good meal. All female guests at the wedding receive small embroidered handkerchiefs, which the new bride either makes or purchases from girls in poorer households for 20 to 30 *Afs* apiece.

Among men and (to a lesser extent) women, there is a strong tradition of helping relatives, neighbours and friends through communal participation in various types of work (*ashar*). This may involve house construction, repair or other tasks. The assurance that one's fellow villagers will reciprocate with participation and assistance at a later date is inherent in these occasions, as it is for all of the aforementioned instances of support.

### 3.6 Gender roles and relations, and female mobility

Although there is no women's *shura* in Panj Ko,<sup>45</sup> there is room for optimism that the general status of women in the community is undergoing some positive change. Indeed, there are two female teachers in the village who work with their male counterparts at Panj Ko School, the majority of the community's girls are enrolled in school (including some in co-educational ninth grade classes), and the women's literacy course is full.

In this close-knit social sphere, females must still follow numerous gender-based rules and regulations. This is in order to preserve not only the family's honour and reputation but also that of the entire village. The female domain in Panj Ko is in the private sphere of the household compound,<sup>46</sup> while the male domain is in the public spaces of the village paths, road, school, mosque, fields, and mountain pastures. In general, girls help their mothers with household chores and fetch water as needed. Prior to puberty, they may also collect firewood, brush and dung in nearby pastures. Boys work with their fathers on the land, take the household's livestock to pasture each day, and collect firewood, brush and dung in pastures and on mountainsides.

Since "everyone knows everyone here" and many of the village households are related through extensive kinship ties, gender segregation is not as strict in Panj Ko as it is in urban centres of Badakhshan (such as Faizabad) where many of the inhabitants do not know one

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<sup>42</sup> The dowry of a well-to-do girl may include numerous household effects (including blankets, curtains, a sewing machine, dishes, a pressure cooker, a water barrel, et cetera) and some livestock. Poorer units provide whatever they can. Girls in the village usually marry between the ages of 14 and 16.

<sup>43</sup> In cash, the bride price is usually 30,000 to 100,000 *Afs*, in addition to livestock, wheat, et cetera. Rich boys may marry in their late teens, but others must wait to accumulate the bride price. Girls who are very beautiful, especially skilled in some respect or literate demand higher prices.

<sup>44</sup> Basic spending for the wedding feast for a well-to-do household may include the following: 120 ser of wheat, 30 ser of rice, 10 ser of oil, 20 ser of cotton (for cushions), one cow and numerous sheep and goats. A less wealthy household may expend 60,000 *Afs* on the food and other supplies.

<sup>45</sup> During the male focus group discussion, the leader of the *shura* noted that "The NGOs made a proposal to us to create a women's *shura*, too, but we suggested to the NSP that the money should rather be spent in the construction of the school and the road."

<sup>46</sup> In this close-knit community, the terraced layout of the houses results in the interconnectedness of many individual households, which share walls and roofs; this allows for much communication and visiting between units.

another and are suspicious of strangers. However, both males and females fear reputation-damaging gossip, which is common among residents. This intensifies in households for unmarried girls as they pass through puberty. Villagers believe that unmarried girls should not go to the places where men gather in the village and should not work in the pastures and mountains once they have reached puberty. This is because there is always the chance of sexual harassment by males. Outside of the household, unmarried girls should always be in the company of other girls or siblings and should never be alone.<sup>47</sup>

A household's fear that their young girls might be sexually abused (and the risk of "bad morals" on the part of males and females) holds potentially negative repercussions, especially for female education beyond ninth grade. Some elder village boys walk to and from a distant high school on the main road daily or rent a room in Faizabad to continue schooling beyond tenth grade. Their female peers, however, currently do not have similar permission. Without the protection of family members, there is always the chance that a girl might lose her virginity (or that "people will talk behind our backs" which is similarly devastating); this would preclude future marriage proposals in Panj Ko's conservative setting.

Villagers also perceive that if a widow below the age of menopause remains unmarried, that situation could potentially endanger a household's reputation in Panj Ko. Therefore, remarriage is common. In most cases, the widow returns to her natal household, which arranges another marriage and usually sends her children to live with her deceased husband's brothers.

### 3.7 Links with Faizabad

Most villagers, regardless of age or gender, have had some exposure to Faizabad; many households have valuable socioeconomic links to the urban centre via close relatives who live there. For example, eight out of the small sample of ten households in this case study have urban kin<sup>48</sup> whom they frequently visit when travelling to Faizabad. Reasons for travel to Faizabad may include: seeking medical care, procuring household supplies in the city's extensive bazaar, and attending weddings and other family ceremonies. Of primary interest to this study is the fact that many men and boys from Panj Ko seek casual or daily wage labour in Faizabad. Boys also make periodic trips to the city by donkey to sell firewood and brush. Finally, a few male teens from the wealthier households in Panj Ko rent rooms in Faizabad, enabling them to attend high school there.

A number of adult male and female respondents, along with their offspring, expressed the desire to move to Faizabad to seek employment, apprenticeship and schooling opportunities for their household members. Some individuals, however, (such as this sister-in-law of one female respondent) find definite social and economic value in village life:

*Here [in the village] everything that is mine is yours. You don't need to ask for permission for things. And, if you want to walk around here and there, no one can ask, 'Why did you come here?' or 'Where are you going?' Also there are many bushes here [for firewood and cooking].*

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<sup>47</sup> Adult women are also not supposed to be alone outside of the village, and thus they travel by foot to the clinic in small groups. Indeed, being alone is often seen as dangerous, both for males or females; in addition to the risk of being attacked by thieves, many villagers fear being assaulted by *jinn* (spirits).

<sup>48</sup> These relatives include: the siblings of heads of household and their wives; cousins; and even more distant relatives.

## 4. Key Findings

The key findings of this research are presented in the following discussion, which focuses specifically on a sample of ten poor households in Panj Ko. Some of these sampled households use child labour and others do not. The research seeks to address the following question: What factors are involved in the decision-making processes by which child labour (CL) and non-child labour (NCL) households manage risk and strategise for survival in their precarious rural environment?

### 4.1 Some basic information: Child labour and non-child labour households

Table 1 contains essential information about the focal children sampled in this study, along with some key characteristics of their households. Seven of the units sampled are CL households, while the remaining three are NCL households. The focal children from CL households (four boys and three girls) are all in early adolescence between 13 and 15 years of age. As mentioned above, child labourers are defined in this study as those 14 years old or younger who work in any setting (with or without pay, within or outside the household) and those ages 15-18 who work in more hazardous occupations.

In the total sample, the average household size is 7.4 members;<sup>49</sup> since all of the units sampled are composed of only two generations,<sup>50</sup> this includes an average of 5.6 children (under 18 years of age) per household.<sup>51</sup> Seven of the sampled families are nuclear in structure, containing only parents and their children; two of these households also include *yatim* (orphans) who are the offspring of the head-of-household's deceased brother. One household is extended and includes two brothers, one of whom is married. Two of the ten households are headed by widowed females. In addition, daughters from five of these families have recently married during the past few years, and now reside in other compounds in either Panj Ko or other nearby villages. In these basic demographic aspects, there is no striking difference between CL and NCL households.

The second column in Table 1 contains some basic information about the focal children themselves: which children work (CL) and which ones do not (NCL), as well as their educational history, which is reviewed in more detail below. Concerning the education of their parents, it is important to note that *none* of the parents in any of these households – neither fathers nor mothers – has any formal education, except for Nuria's father, who has fifth grade education and is literate. Two fathers and two mothers can read the Quran,<sup>52</sup> however, and four women are currently enrolled in the village-based female literacy course sponsored by the WHO.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> This number is considerably larger than the statistic quoted in quantitative studies of Badakhshan in general, which is 5.8 members per household. "Badakhshan: A Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile" (Kabul: Central Statistics Office of Afghanistan and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2007), 14.

<sup>50</sup> This may indicate that older relatives (e.g. surviving parent(s) of a head of household or their spouse) reside with wealthier offspring in other households.

<sup>51</sup> This includes a total of 28 boys and 28 girls; two women out of the 10 households (#3 and #6) report that they are currently taking contraceptives.

<sup>52</sup> These fathers are from households #2 and #7; the mothers are from households #2 and #8

<sup>53</sup> These women live in households #2, #6, #9 and #10. The mother in household #7 is on the waiting list for next year.

## 4.2 The village school: Educational options for *almost all* children

Table 1 also features brief information about the education of each focal child. None of the four boys from sampled CL households (Ibrahim, Hussein, Nabi and Abdul) attend school at present; they only work. In contrast, the three CL girls (Karima, Leyluma and Mariam) are all enrolled in the village school in Panj Ko and combine school and work. In short, because the boys' labour activities entail long hours in the mountains and/or travel to Faizabad, they cannot combine work and school. In the girls' case, however, their work is very localised, which enables them to attend school in the morning and work in the afternoons.<sup>54</sup>

Table 1: Basic characteristics of the sample village households (CL and NCL)

Focal Child Identifier	Child Labour and Education Status	Household Size and Composition
<b>CHILD LABOUR (CL) HOUSEHOLDS</b>		
1. Ibrahim, age 15, male	CL only, no school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8 people: 6 children, ages 10-15 years; mother and father</li> <li>3 daughters, 3 sons</li> <li>Ibrahim and his twin brother are the household's eldest children</li> </ul>
2. Hussein, age 15, male	CL only, dropped out of 1st grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10 people: 7 biological children, ages 11 months-17 years, plus Hussein, an orphan who is the eldest boy.<sup>55</sup></li> <li>3 daughters, 4 sons, and Hussein</li> <li>Head of household is Hussein's deceased father's brother; Hussein's mother has remarried</li> </ul>
3. Nabi, age 15, male	CL only, school through 5th grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6 people: Nabi, 3 children, ages 6 months-6 years; Nabi's elder brother and his wife</li> <li>2 daughters, 1 son</li> <li>Nabi's brother is the head of household; their father died 3 months ago, and their mother is absent</li> </ul>
4. Abdul, age 13, male	CL only, school through 6th grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6 people: 5 children, ages 2-15 years; widowed mother</li> <li>2 daughters, 3 sons</li> <li>Father died 7 months ago</li> </ul>
5. Karima, age 13, female	CL/school, currently in 4th grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7 people: 5 children, ages 8-18 years; mother and father</li> <li>4 daughters, 1 son</li> <li>Two elder sons died at ages 13 and 18; remaining son is age 10</li> </ul>
6. Leyluma, age 13, female	CL/school, currently in 6th grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8 people: 6 children, ages 1 year-15 years</li> <li>4 daughters, 2 sons</li> <li>Youngest children are boys: 1 year old and 5 year old</li> </ul>
7. Mariam, age 13, female	CL/school, currently in 6th grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6 people: father and mother; Mohtarama, their own child; 3 orphans (children of head of household's deceased brother)</li> <li>Orphans: 2 girls, 1 boy, ages 9-15; mother remarried</li> </ul>

<sup>54</sup> See later sections for more discussion about these gender-based differences in village CL.

<sup>55</sup> In the context of Panj Ko, the term "orphan" (yatim) is used most frequently to refer to those children whose fathers have died and whose mothers have (in most cases) re-married, leaving them with paternal relatives.

Table 1 (continued): Basic characteristics of the sample village households (CL and NCL)

Non-Child Labour (NCL) Households		
8. Naim, age 18, male	NCL, currently in 11th grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 people: 4 children, ages 8-18 years; widowed mother</li> <li>• 2 daughters, 2 sons</li> <li>• Father died 4 years ago</li> </ul>
9. Suraya, age 15, female	NCL, Currently in 7th grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 people: 6 children ages 1 year-19 years; mother and father</li> <li>• 3 daughters, 3 sons</li> </ul>
10. Karim age 15, male	NCL, currently in 4th grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 people: 8 offspring ages 1 year-22 years; mother and father</li> <li>• 2 daughters, 6 sons</li> </ul>

A general look at the education of the school-aged children in this case study's sample of ten poor households reveals that:

*All* of the school-aged children (both boys and girls) in the three NCL households attend school.<sup>56</sup>

*Almost all* of the school-aged siblings (both boys and girls) of the seven CL children are enrolled in the Panj Ko School,<sup>57</sup> with only three exceptions.<sup>58</sup>

Thus the children in these CL households who only work are the exceptions to the rule in the context of this specific village of Badakhshan. Understanding why these children work – and why the boys who work do not attend school like their siblings and peers – is central to this case study. The first step in addressing this question is to examine why the village school is so successful at enrolling children.

First, the community's children do not have any difficulty regarding school access. Both boys and girls must walk "only a few minutes" to reach the large combined elementary and middle school, which is located on the main road that stretches through the village and holds separate classes for grades one through nine for boys and girls in the mornings from nine a.m. until noon.<sup>59</sup> Second, the school principal manages the school very well. As the school's principal, he and his dedicated staff know the village populace intimately and monitor school enrolment and attendance carefully.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, as an elderly woman mentioned during one conversation:

<sup>56</sup> This is based on a total of 15 school-aged children in the NCL households, which includes eight boys and seven girls.

<sup>57</sup> The enrolled school-aged siblings of the CL children include four boys and 15 girls; these households also include ten pre-school boys and two pre-school girls. Without quantitative data, it is impossible to explore the possibility that the poverty of these households is linked to their prevalence of elder female offspring. It does appear, however, that the couples in this sample continued to try to produce male offspring and eventually succeeded.

<sup>58</sup> In Household #1, Ibrahim's twin brother is not in school; in Household #4, Abdul's elder brother works with him as a shepherd and does not attend school; and in Household #6, Leyluma's elder sister is not in school but attends the women's literacy course.

<sup>59</sup> Some of the subjects for ninth grade students in Panj Ko's school are taught separately, while others are co-educational.

<sup>60</sup> Indeed, as to be reviewed later, the *qomandan* and teachers also play a major role in some households' decisions to withdraw children from school for child labour; for more information, see page 44.

*If we don't send the children to school, then someone will come from the school and knock on our door to ask the reason.*

Fathers and mothers from both CL and NCL households unanimously laud the school's activities and state that they highly value education for both their sons and their daughters. There is also a political dimension involved in this support: how could a household go against the leadership structure of the community – which stresses education for both boys and girls – and not send its children to school?

The school principal (who is a member of the *Jamiat-i-Islami* party) is politically active and has excellent links with the provincial power structure in Faizabad. He was largely responsible for the construction of the new school building in 2006, which was supported through World Bank funding. Indeed, the *Jamiat-i-Islami* party has a generally progressive reputation, in comparison to some of the other political parties in Afghanistan; this generally includes support for education of both males and females. This response from Karima's mother (whose four daughters and one son all attend Panj Ko's school) is very common and illustrates the positive group morale that has been established in regards to education (which also makes this village not necessarily typical of others):

*Everyone sends their daughters and sons to school in this village. Nowadays all the children are going to school.*

Abdul's mother is an extremely poor widow; her two eldest sons have recently left school to work as village shepherds while her younger daughter and son remain enrolled. Regarding education, Abdul's mother said:

*Both girls and boys should go to school! (She opened her eyes very wide to stress this point.) They should learn everything! If I were able to read, I could be a teacher in a school and get 3,000 Afs as a monthly salary, but I'm illiterate and cannot find any job that brings in good money.*

Indeed, the non-literate parents from both CL and NCL households all value education. This is not only because it gives their children a chance to gain knowledge ("to be able to read and write," "to be able to talk with people," et cetera) but also – more importantly – because it provides them with an opportunity to find productive employment in the future. The villagers strongly and unanimously believe that education will lead to good jobs for both sons and daughters. The mother of Hussein (a boy who works gathering and selling firewood and is not enrolled in school) has three younger daughters and one son enrolled in the Panj Ko school. She mentioned a number of positive rewards education can bring, including payment in both cash and kind:

*Their father is angry because he did not study at all. If he'd studied at least a little, then at least he could have been a simple employee somewhere. If my children study, then they will not be blind like us...I mean, I cannot even weave a gilam. If I'd have studied, I could have taught my children, and also taught at the literacy course, and when someone would come to evaluate the course then he would reward me with three sacks of wheat.*

Parents often expressed the desire for their children to “become someone,” and the children themselves echoed this desire.<sup>61</sup> The parents of Mariam (who goes to school in the morning and tends her father’s small shop in the afternoon) both have high hopes for their three daughters and one son, all of whom are in school. As her mother, who grew up during the years of war, said:

*They should study and become everything they themselves wish to be, and their father and mother will work to do everything possible for them to succeed. Should they stay around us just to collect firewood and dung? I want them to become someone, because we [Mariam’s mother and father] had our futures damaged.*

Many of the 14 male teachers at Panj Ko School are from other settlements in Badakhshan, and must reside on the school’s premises. Since the government does not provide them with funds for their board and room, the teachers find that their salaries are insufficient. The school staff has arrived at a local solution to this concern: each household with enrolled children has agreed to pay a monthly fee to supplement those teachers who are not from the village. This strategy appears to be very successful. Karim’s father, who currently has three sons and two daughters attending Panj Ko School (none of whom work) explained:

*Each month we pay a certain amount of money per child for their teachers, because the government only pays a salary which is not sufficient for their needs. From first to third class, the teachers collect ten Afs per child, and from fourth grade to ninth grade, they collect 20 Afs per child. This money is used for the teachers’ food.*

Although this monthly fee system may strain the budget of a poor household (especially if a number of the household’s children are enrolled in school), the research team encountered no words of resistance during its conversations with parents. This response from Mariam’s mother (who has four offspring enrolled) is typical:

*I know that schooling has its expenses, but as long as I’m alive we will spend the money for their schooling. I also expect that all four of them will study, and then will help me later [in life]. Working is good, but studying is the most important... You know, some people say that children should work to become wise, but I say that if they are healthy and study properly, they can become wise and also find money “through the pen”... [by that I mean that] they can get a good job and earn money.*

Parents in the sampled households are also pleased with the quality of teaching available at the Panj Ko. Fathers mentioned that they frequently obtain reports from the male teachers (who may also be their friends) about how their sons and their daughters are progressing. They are also pleased that homework is regularly assigned. Only one child, Nabi, related that he had been beaten by his teacher for not learning his lessons before he had to drop out of fifth grade when his father passed away. Parents do concede, however, that the overall quality of education is better in Faizabad than in the village school, where facilities are also lacking. Suraya’s father (the only parent in this entire sample who has some formal

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<sup>61</sup> See page 53 for more details about parents’ and children’s aspirations for the future.

education) has two boys and three girls enrolled, none of whom work. He is the only parent who seemed to feel qualified enough to provide further criticism:

*Children in the school have no chairs or desks; they are sitting on the cold ground on a piece of cloth. They lack pens, pencils, and notebooks too. The teachers' salary is often late to arrive. But [at least] they are trying to teach the students...*

It is of special importance to this case study that both parents and children also note the sympathy and special assistance of the school's principal and teaching staff towards those students who must combine work and school. Karima says that "they understand" and do not mark her absent on days when she must graze her sheep during school time. Leyluma's father notes that if his daughters have extra household tasks to perform, either at home or in another compound, they submit a leave application to the principal and are able to take some time off. In Karim's household, where none of the children work and all of them attend school, his mother related how her son (who is in ninth grade) was allowed to start school two weeks late last year because he was helping his maternal uncle harvest wheat.

As previously mentioned, villagers greatly appreciated the WFP's twice annual distribution of foodstuffs at Panj Ko School through the Food For Education programme when it was in effect.<sup>62</sup> This distribution included: 50 kg bags of wheat for all students, five litres of cooking oil for each female student as well as nutritional biscuits (100 grams) daily for each student. Although none of the households sampled have withdrawn their children from school since the programme's cancellation, parents clearly miss the valuable rations. Indeed, most households received a substantial amount of total supplies from the programme because they have a number of sons and daughters enrolled. Leyluma's father, whose four daughters all attend school, remembered: "I used to go to school twice a year with a donkey to pick up the wheat and oil." Abdul's mother (who had four children in school, until her two eldest sons were withdrawn from school to work because of the death of her husband) believes that her household could perhaps survive on the WFP food aid:

*Now students aren't given any more food at school. In the past every male student was given one sack of wheat and every female student was given a sack of wheat and a can of ghee...if it was still provided, I could have let my sons continue their schooling...I could have lived on that aid...*

The extremely popular WHO-sponsored literacy course (which is taught by the two female teachers from Panj Ko School) also distributes wheat to its participants at the end of the course. The four women from the sampled households who are enrolled say that they have not learned much from this course, and Karim's mother candidly responds that she attends primarily so that she can contribute to her household in lieu of any other type of employment: "I go to the course just for the sake of bringing something [wheat] home..."

Fathers and mothers optimistically mention that the government has promised the community that the Panj Ko School (which now has classes through ninth grade) will be upgraded to a high school with classes for boys and girls through twelfth grade. Some fathers from the sampled households note that they are in communication with the local *qomandan* about this. As previously mentioned, some of the village boys who have completed ninth grade continue their education either by walking daily to and from a boys'

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<sup>62</sup> The FFE programme will not resume until the most recent National Vulnerability Assessment results have been tabulated.

high school in Tal Basang or (if they are well-to-do) by living and attending school in Faizabad. Due to socio-cultural sanctions, however this is not currently possible for village girls.<sup>63</sup> Many parents and daughters desire an opportunity for girls' high school education, but they are afraid or unable to take the first step. As Karim's mother, who has two daughters and three sons in school, said:

*If everyone in the village sends their daughters to another village for study, we will send ours too...but the problem is, no one has done that yet...*<sup>64</sup>

### 4.3 The rural household economy: Insecurity and limited options

The following brief description of Nabi's CL household – taken from field notes – is typical of a poor village home in Panj Ko and will help to set the scene for future analysis:

*...the frame of the main gate is made of wood, but instead of a door there is a plastic sheet in place. We entered and saw stacks of brush, and dung cakes stuck on the wall to dry. The yard is very large, with some potatoes and tomatoes being cultivated. Under the large tree a big dog was tied...there was also a donkey and some chickens. Inside their mud-walled room was an old Iranian carpet, some mattresses (no pillows), and a wooden cradle. The room's only window was covered with plastic, and the ceiling was covered with cloth. Pictures of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, along with one of horses, hung on the wall.*

Indeed, the asset portfolios of all households sampled in this study (both CL and NCL) are very meagre. In contrast to their urban counterparts,<sup>65</sup> however, none of these ten rural families have to face urban expenditures such as the struggle to pay high rents and costly fuel purchases, which are often debilitating. Leyluma's family, whose father is the client of a rich commander and landowner, resides in a small house that belongs to their patron. All of the other households included in this sample from Panj Ko own their homes, along with small walled-in parcels of land that surround the structures.

Table 2 illustrates the work activities of both CL and NCL households, including those of the focal CL children. The majority of these work activities are short-term and seasonal in nature, and most units must incorporate both agriculture-based and non-farm undertakings (largely unskilled labour in the informal sector) into their livelihood strategies.<sup>66</sup>

None of these households are self-sufficient based on the produce of their own fields; four are landless, and the others possess only small *lalmi* (rain-fed) plots, which are often

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<sup>63</sup> If the local school is not upgraded, the group of seven girls who are about to graduate from the ninth grade has made a plan for the next school year: they will walk to and from the girls' high school in another community, Loya Ba, in the company of their fathers, and each girl's father will take his turn as chaperone. It remains to be seen, however, if this plan will materialise.

<sup>64</sup> Some mothers mention that the village benefactor, Haji Zahir, has offered scholarships to Panj Ko girls (like those he has provided for some boys) but no household has taken him up on this offer yet.

<sup>65</sup> For more information on households and child labour in an urban setting, see the other case studies in this series, which were conducted in the urban centres of Kabul and Herat.

<sup>66</sup> Work activities in the village change significantly according to the seasons. The fieldwork for this research was carried out in the non-agricultural late fall season (November); respondents would have related a different array of undertakings if the team had arrived in spring or summer.

shared with numerous brothers or mortgaged.<sup>67</sup> In the peak agricultural seasons of spring and early fall, both men and boys from this sample engage in sharecropping and other on-farm tasks for more well-to-do villagers. Boys and girls in all households gather dung and firewood for household consumption every day, except in winter. Older boys (such as Ibrahim, Hussein and Nabi) also travel to Faizabad to sell firewood. Some children graze their own family's livestock, while other households contract both men and boys like Abdul for this purpose. Payment between villagers is frequently in wheat or bread, which is often used for barter in Panj Ko. Concerning tasks such as fuel gathering and livestock grazing, the key difference between CL and NCL households is in the intensity and time that the children spend on these work activities.

With little capital available and limited markets, villagers have severely limited profitable options for their livelihoods. The father of Ibrahim (CL) related how he attempts to combine agricultural and other non-farm work in an insecure environment:

*I have 1.5 jerib [0.3 ha] of rainfed land, and I usually cultivate wheat, barley, and zigher (linseed) for making oil. Along with farming, I'm also a carpenter and a mason. I don't have much livestock – only two goats and a donkey. We're poor and don't have livestock and irrigated lands, and the production of my fields is very low. I do most of my work from spring to fall. In the spring I cultivate and do weeding, and some carpentry like making windows and doors. But in this village people can't afford to build new houses, and that's why I'm not making money. Some years are good, and others bad – we've had drought and that's also hurt our crops. At that time I had to do wage labouring in this village and sometimes I went to Faizabad to work too...*

Community-based work opportunities are also restricted for the females sampled in this study. With the exceptions of selling eggs to neighbours on occasion (as the mothers of Abdul and Naim do) and making *gilam* and *raqsa*<sup>68</sup> for other villagers (which the mothers of Leyluma and Naim do very infrequently), Panj Ko does not appear to have any ongoing tradition of successful women's income-generation. Leyluma's mother says the following about the sporadic nature of her weaving activities:

*Whenever I have the materials or a villager asks me to do it, then I weave a gilam or make a saddle sack. Someone asks me to make these things once every couple months or so...it takes ten days or more to finish a gilam and five days to do a saddle sack. I get paid in kind – for example, some rice, flour, or oil. It's not a fixed payment, but just whatever they can afford to give.*

Some girls, including Leyluma, undertake household chores for neighbours and wealthier villagers, such as ironing or washing clothes, dishes and rugs; in return, the girls receive payment in kind. Alternatively, Mariam takes care of her father's small shop, and Karima grazes her family's livestock; like young girls in all the households (CL and NCL), they are also occupied with numerous daily household chores.

<sup>67</sup> For example, Nabi's elder brother relates that their household has 1 *jerib* of rain-fed land on which they grow wheat and barley every other year. They obtain 40 to 50 *ser* of wheat each harvest. This is just enough to last the six members household for six months; for the remainder of the year, they must buy their wheat or flour.

<sup>68</sup>The flat-weave *gilam* is used as a floor-covering, while the *raqsa* is a floor-cloth upon which to eat meals (also known as a *distarkhwan*).

The National Solidarity Program (NSP) and NGOs have presented opportunities for cash payment at the village level, in the areas of local road construction and the village sanitation project (respectively). Some adult males (N = 5) as well as two of the boys (Ibrahim and Abdul) included in this sample have taken advantage of these work opportunities.

**Table 2: Household work activities: CL and NCL**

Focal child identifier	Work activities of focal child	Work activities of other household members
<b>CHILD LABOUR (CL) HOUSEHOLDS</b>		
1. Ibrahim, age 15, male	Farm labour (harvesting, grazing, etc.) Helps father with carpentry Village sanitation project (pipe-laying) Gathers firewood for sale in Faizabad Formerly worked at hotel in Faizabad	<b>Father:</b> wage labour (carpentry, masonry) in Faizabad; farming on own land (1.5 <i>jerib</i> ); village sanitation project (pipe-laying); <b>Twin brother:</b> village sanitation project (pipe-laying)
2. Hussein, age 15, male	Gathers firewood/sells in Faizabad Helps father (sharecropping, masonry) Grazes household livestock	<b>Father:</b> wage labour (mason); shepherd; sharecropping (on their mortgaged land and elsewhere); sanitation project labour
3. Nabi, age 15, male	Wage labour in Faizabad (masonry) Gathers firewood/sells in Faizabad	<b>None:</b> elder brother occupied with greeting condoling relatives and friends for one year following their father's death
4. Abdul, age 13, male	<i>Chopan</i> (contract shepherd) for village Village sanitation project (pipe-laying) Collects firewood for household	<b>Elder brother (15):</b> same work as Abdul; <b>Mother (widow):</b> sells eggs
5. Karima, age 13, female	Grazes household livestock Collects dung and firewood for household Performs household chores at home	<b>Father:</b> wage labour (construction) in village, agricultural work for others; cannot work very often due to back injury
6. Leyluma, age 13, female	Performs household chores for others (washes clothes, dishes, rugs; irons, etc.) Embroiders for others Performs household chores at home	<b>Father:</b> contracted manager for nearby commander (takes care of orchards, livestock, etc.); <b>Mother:</b> weaves <i>gilam</i> ; <b>Sister (15):</b> same work as Leyluma
7. Mariam, age 13, female	Works as shopkeeper in her father's shop	<b>Father:</b> stocks village shop in Faizabad; road construction; buys and sells livestock; village sanitation project (pipe-laying)

Table 2 (continued): Household work activities: CL and NCL

NON-CHILD LABOUR (NCL) HOUSEHOLDS		
8. Naim, age 18, male	Worked for a week on sanitation project; shows no interest in village work	<b>Mother (widow):</b> weaves <i>raqsa</i> ; makes stoves and ovens; sells eggs; teaches Quran to children; tailor
9. Suraya, age 15, female	Performs household chores; makes dung cakes, gives fodder to household cow	<b>Father:</b> Wage labour (construction in Faizabad); farms on others' land; CHW in village
10. Karim age 15, male	Collects bushes in mountains for household fuel; fetches water and fodder for household cow	<b>Elder brother:</b> Wage labour (construction in Faizabad); farms for others; village road construction <b>Father:</b> paralyzed 3 years ago; does not work now

Participants in the NSP and NGO programs greatly appreciate the daily wages of 150 *Afs* that they receive for their labour; unfortunately, however, the work is seasonal, short-term and cannot employ all those from Panj Ko who want to participate. Thus, some men (N = 4) and boys (for instance, Nabi) make the long trip to Faizabad, usually by bus. There, they find short-term unskilled work in the informal sector, primarily in construction. For periods of up to a few weeks they work on projects and receive 150 to 200 *Afs* per day along with lunch, while skilled masons and carpenters can obtain 300 to 400 *Afs* per day. These work periods require the workers to stay at a hotel in town, which usually costs about 50 *Afs* per night for room and board.<sup>69</sup>

Central to the livelihoods strategies of these poor households is their concerted attempt to reduce risk by diversification. There are limited options for this process, however, in the village and in Faizabad. None of the individuals in this sample has the security of a salaried position. Instead, household members are constantly considering different short-term daily-wage work opportunities, many of which never materialise. Periods of *baikari* (unemployment) are very common, especially for adult males; when combined with many the many risks of agriculture, this affords villagers little occasion to confidently plan for the future.<sup>70</sup>

In this context, some households diversify by using child labour. In other households, child labour is the sole source of income; in these households, the earnings that young boys and girls provide their families are crucial. For example, in Nabi's household (which is especially vulnerable), he is currently the only household member who works. His sister-in-law, a mother of three small children, notes how central his work is to their survival:

<sup>69</sup> In spite of the fact that a household may have close relatives residing in Faizabad, CL boys who travel there usually stay in hotels rather than with their kin in order to avoid being perceived as a burden. The boys usually pay visits to their urban relatives, however, and sometimes bring fresh bread to the city kin from the village.

<sup>70</sup> None of the ten households in this sample currently have relatives working in Iran or Pakistan, and none receive remittances. Indeed, Ibrahim's elder brother went to Iran but made no money and is now estranged from the family in Kabul. Karim's elder brother was successful in a construction job in Iran, returned recently with savings and is now engaged in intermittent casual wage labour in Faizabad and in the village.

*If Nabi doesn't take bundles of bushes [to Faizabad] to sell, then we won't have any money for our daily bread.*

### ***Children's earnings and their uses***

Table 3 lists the earnings of the seven focal children who work and describes how these remunerations – a combination of both cash and kind – are used by their families. It is difficult to estimate what proportion the children's contributions make up in their household's budget. In each case sampled, however, the proportion is considerable, especially when the adults in the household are not working. The payment that the child obtains is turned over to his or her father or mother, or (in one case) to an elder brother. The bread and wheat that Abdul earns keeps his family alive and also serves as a medium of exchange for other household supplies that his mother obtains; his little sister collects bread every day from each village household that Abdul serves as *chopan*. Their mother explained:

*From the breads that Nuria brings home, we eat some of them, and then other neighbours come to borrow some too. In exchange for these breads, we receive tea, soap, or vegetables.*

Leyluma brings valuable household supplies (such as cooking oil, rice, sugar, tea, and soap) home from her work in other compounds. Ibrahim, Hussein and Nabi obtain cash primarily in Faizabad; in addition, the boys purchase and bring home household supplies from the city that are not available in the village (for example, rice, tea, sugar, soap, cooking oil and lamp oil). The cash that Ibrahim and Nabi generate from their work is also used by their fathers to repay the outstanding debts of their households. In general, the remuneration that youths receive for their work does not differ from that which adults obtain for similar labour.

Children usually turn their earnings over to the family coffers. Hussein and Nabi (both of whom commute to and from Faizabad to sell firewood), however, do note that they are allowed to take some spending money from their earnings when necessary. As Hussein notes:<sup>71</sup>

*I keep 10-20 Afs [of the money I make] for myself. I don't need to ask my parents. If I need the money, then I can take as much as I want. When I stay in the hotel in Faizabad, then I use the money to buy soap and shampoo for myself, and also for my food.*

Ibrahim, however, does not have such good relations with his parents, believes that they love his twin brother more than him and had the following response:

*My father doesn't give me any money, so when I sell firewood or work in the city and get my payment, I take some of the money and don't tell my father. He says, "You have enough food at home – what do you need money for?"*

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<sup>71</sup> Hussein is actually the nephew of the head of household and his wife, although he usually refers to them as his father and mother.

Table 3: Children's earnings and their uses

Focal Child Identifier	Payment Type	Payments Received	How Payments are Used
1. Ibrahim, age 15, male	Cash and kind	<p><b>Farm labour:</b> 1 <i>ser</i> wheat for 4-5 months work</p> <p><b>Sanitation project (V):</b> 150 <i>Afs</i> per day</p> <p><b>Selling firewood (F):</b> 150-200 <i>Afs</i> per load</p>	Given to father; Ibrahim purchases household supplies in Faizabad; contributes to general household subsistence and debt payment
2. Hussein, age 14, male	Cash	<b>Selling firewood (F):</b> 150-200 <i>Afs</i> per load, usually every 2-3 days	Given to father; Hussein purchases household supplies in Faizabad; used only for household subsistence and not for debt payment
3. Nabi, age 15, male	Cash	<p><b>Wage labour (masonry) (F):</b> 150-200 <i>Afs</i> per day (with lunch) for 20 days</p> <p><b>Selling firewood (F):</b> 150 to 300 <i>Afs</i> per load</p>	Given to brother; Nabi purchases household supplies in Faizabad; comprises total household budget; used for both subsistence and debts
4. Abdul, age 13, male	Cash and kind	<p><b>Village shepherd:</b> for 2-3 goats, one bread every other day; for 5 or more goats, 1 bread per day; 1 <i>ser</i> wheat per 3 goats or sheep from each household in the fall</p> <p><b>Sanitation project (V.):</b> 150 <i>Afs</i> per day</p>	Given to mother; younger sister collects bread from participating households daily; used for general household subsistence
5. Karima, age 13, female	n/a	Receives no payment for grazing her household's sheep and gathering brush	Brush used as household fuel
6. Leyluma, age 13, female	Kind	<p><b>Chores in other households:</b> cooking oil, rice, sugar, tea, soap (no fixed amount); also usually receives lunch</p> <p><b>Embroidery:</b> 1-2 soaps, rice, sugar</p>	Given to mother; used for general household consumption
7. Mariam, age 13, female	Cash and kind	<b>Shopkeeping:</b> obtains small amounts of money from sales of soap, biscuits, chewing gum, matches, sugar, snuff, etc.; sometimes receives eggs as barter	Given to father and mother; contributes to general household budget
V. = Village; F. = Faizabad			

### *The Opium Poppy*

In recent years, cultivation of the opium poppy has been a part of many village households' livelihood diversification – the strategy by which they have attempted to deal with the prevalent risks and insecurities of village life.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, during the extensive conversations with both parents and children, the sensitive topic of growing poppies was brought up in four out of ten households, all of which are CL units.<sup>73</sup> These discussions provide some clues regarding children's involvement in the process of poppy cultivation. Villagers were especially cautious in speaking about this topic, however; a Poppy Elimination Programme (PEP) team had arrived in Faizabad just a few days prior to the research team's arrival in Panj Ko, and some villagers feared that the fieldwork for this project might somehow have been related. Although poppy cultivation in the area appears to have decreased considerably in recent years and the populace is well aware of the threat of eradication, some villagers still desire to sow the very profitable crop.<sup>74</sup> Hussein's household has grown poppies in previous years, and his mother had this to say on the topic:

*I tell my husband that we should plant some poppy this year, but he says that the government says it's bad...Everyone grew it before! If people didn't grow it, they'd have died of hunger...Hussein did the plowing, while his father would turn the soil and plant behind the ox...We hired an expert to come to cut [the pods], and all of us would collect the resin.*

In past years, boys have also worked as wage labourers in the poppy fields of others. Nabi noted that in previous years he was busy collecting the resin, both within the village and in other communities, for 50 Afs per day. In spite of the risks involved, the widowed mother of Abdul also wants her sons to participate in such work in the future:

*In the spring, there's lots of work in the village. My sons can go to work in the fields and collect the poppy resin in the mountains, and I will help them in this work too [by weeding]. We'll divide the profits with the landowner. For example, if we collect four pau of gum, two pau would belong to us and 2 pau to the owner. I'd sell the gum and would make 2,000 to 3,000 Afs – I'd be able to buy all of my household needs...I've heard that recently the price of poppy has gone down to 600 Afs a pau, though.*

Poppy use in the village is apparent from the following description provided by field staff:

*At this point during our visit, the neighbour who was sitting with us took out a packet of tariok resin from her pocket and showed it to us. Before popping*

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<sup>72</sup> For centuries Badakhshan has been an important poppy-growing region of Afghanistan, and this continues at present according to: "Badakhshan." SMU Area Report. (Islamabad: Strategic Monitoring Unit Afghanistan, May 2001). The period 2001-03 was especially profitable for the region. However, in recent years counter-narcotics efforts (both actual and threatened) have increased, prices of other crops such as wheat and potatoes have risen, and the overall price of opium has fallen, according to: Adam Pain, *Opium Poppy and Informal Credit* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Forthcoming).

<sup>73</sup> The local term, *cognagh*, is used for the unprocessed plant, while *tariok* refers to the processed substance (or resin).

<sup>74</sup> David Mansfield has recently found that poppy growth persists in Badakhshan, especially in the more remote regions where wage labour opportunities and other livelihood options are scarce, according to: David Mansfield, *Governance, Security, and Economic Growth: The Determinants of Opium Poppy Cultivation in the Districts of Jurm and Baharak in Badakhshan* (German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and Alternative Knowledge Development Network (AKDN), February 2007).

*some into her mouth, she asked, "Would you like to eat some? We use it as medicine around here."*<sup>75</sup>

The risks involved for those gathering resin in the fields often include dizziness and vomiting, which can especially affect children. An individual's resistance increases with exposure, however. The research team observed no blatant cases of opium addiction in the village, although such cases may have been present.<sup>76</sup>

### *Debts*

Most of the rural households included in this case study are deeply in debt, as indicated in Table 4, which also shows the various credit providers and each household's reasons for specific debts. Debt levels range from 200 *Afs* to 47,500 *Afs*,<sup>77</sup> with an average debt of approximately 22,350 *Afs*. In general, the CL households reported more debts than the NCL households. These poor households have many credit providers, which primarily include: shopkeepers, relatives, neighbours, other villagers (both rich and poor) and friends. Most of these credit sources live in Panj Ko; a minority of lenders are located in Faizabad. These data clearly indicate that – in the absence of any local banks or microcredit projects – the residents of Panj Ko are able to borrow on a no-interest basis when necessary, by turning to members of their extensive local social networks.<sup>78</sup>

Unlike many Afghans residing in urban settings, who must often go into significant debt to pay for high rents and fuel, the villagers of Panj Ko own their homes. They can also rely on the "free" fuel source in the form of brush and firewood, which their children gather daily from nearby hills and mountains. Children from CL and NCL households do this in varying degrees of intensity. Poor households incur many of these debts as part of a general coping strategy for obtaining basic consumption needs, and repayment of these non-interest loans is "highly flexible and negotiable."<sup>79,80</sup>

The rural household is, nonetheless, extremely vulnerable to a number of unforeseen shocks such as illness, death, drought and floods. These can result in sudden changes in the well-being of the household and the extent of their indebtedness; this has been the case for at least six of the units in this sample. Nabi's elder brother related the details of how his father's death has left his household indebted to villagers and teachers so that they could fulfil the extensive funeral rituals that many friends and relatives attend to pay their respects:

<sup>75</sup> *Tariok* is often used as an indigenous medicine to induce infants' sleep and to treat fatigue, pain, coughs, colds, et cetera.

<sup>76</sup> In Faizabad, the NGO *Nejat* sponsors a treatment centre for cases of severe addiction, including men, women and children from throughout the province; their centre is usually full.

<sup>77</sup> This equals approximately US\$4 to US\$930 (US\$1=50 *Afs*)

<sup>78</sup> These findings are similar to those cited in the *Finding the Money: Informal Credit Practices in Rural Afghanistan*, an AREU synthesis paper. Even Abdul's very vulnerable household, which is only 5,000 *Afs* in debt from his father's funeral, could obtain more money on credit. His mother refrains from doing so, however, saying: "...since my husband died, I don't buy things on credit from the local shop because it's so hard to repay...and I plead with those with whom I have debts to give me some more time to pay them back." Floortje Klijn and Adam Pain, *Finding the Money: Informal Credit Practices in Rural Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, June 2007).

<sup>79</sup> Floortje Klijn and Adam Pain, *Finding the Money: Informal Credit Practices in Rural Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, June 2007), ix.

<sup>80</sup> Indeed, during conversations in the respondents' homes, discussion was frequently interrupted by the arrival at the door of a creditor (a relative, a shopkeeper, etc.) who was providing a reminder of an outstanding debt. After brief discussion, the creditor usually departed to wait for another day for his repayment.

*For the funeral and condolence of my father I borrowed money and spent it for the purposes of reciting the Quran and other expenses. I bought wheat and two goats, and I killed them on the first day (after the death). Then on the seventh day I killed another two goats, and on the 40th day another two. At the end of one year I will kill another two. It's the custom to serve meat to the participants of the condolence assembly.*

**Table 4: Household debts, credit providers, and reasons for debt**

Focal child	Current household debts	Credit providers	Reasons for debt
<b>CHILD LABOUR (CL) HOUSEHOLDS</b>			
1. Ibrahim	3,000 Af\$ 10,000 Af\$ 2,000 Af\$ 30,000 Af\$	Shopkeeper in Faizabad Father's friend in Faizabad Mother's cousin Rich villager	Household consumption (oil, etc.) Medical bills of father in Faizabad Household consumption Household consumption
2. Hussein	100 Af\$ 5,000 Af\$ 20,000 Af\$	Neighbour (female) Unknown Other villagers	Girl's school <i>chadar</i> (scarf) Medical bills of mother Funeral costs of father's brother
3. Nabi	6,000 Af\$ 1,000 Af\$ 40,000 Af\$	Neighbour Shopkeeper in village Villagers, teachers	Use of oven for bread-baking Household consumption Funeral costs of father
4. Abdul	5,000 Af\$	Relatives, villagers	Funeral costs of Father
5. Karima	Wheat 46,000 Af\$ 1,500 Af\$	Relatives, neighbours, friends Shopkeeper in Faizabad, cousin, brother, neighbour Local mason	Household consumption in winter Medical bills for Karima's brother (in both Faizabad and Kabul) Constructed new guestroom
6. Leyluma	200 Af\$ Unknown Unknown	Neighbours Miller Shopkeepers in village	Household consumption (Waiting for their patron, the commander, to pay all of the household debts)
7. Mariam	6,000 Af\$ 8,000 Af\$	Shopkeepers in village (3) Traders in Faizabad	Household consumption Flood damage to their small shop
<b>NON-CHILD LABOUR (NCL) HOUSEHOLDS</b>			
8. Naim	16,000 Af\$ 1,500 Af\$	Relatives, wealthy villagers Shopkeeper in village	Medical bills for father Tea, soap, and other supplies
9. Suraya	Unknown Unknown 2,000 Af\$	Miller Shopkeepers in village and Faizabad Relative	Household consumption Household consumption Household consumption
10. Karim	200 Af\$	Shopkeeper in village	Household consumption

In the cases of both Nabi and Abdul, the deaths of their fathers have resulted in decisions that withdrew them from school so that they could work to support their families.<sup>81</sup>

Mortgaging land to other villagers (which is not included in Table 4) provides households with significant cash and has been a common, often-repeated occurrence in the recent history of four of the ten sample households (all of which also use child labour).<sup>82</sup> Households usually mortgage land to minimise the shock of an expensive illness or similar emergency. In addition, units also sell their assets (such as livestock or sewing machines) as a coping strategy in order to survive in times of trouble. In years past, some poor households have arranged marriages for their eldest daughters. Ibrahim's mother related that the bride price (*qalyn*) of his two elder sisters was spent for their household's consumption:

*Their father married them off [when] they were very young...we married Delaram to one of the neighbours because we didn't have enough money at that time...*<sup>83</sup>

In the absence of formal social protection programmes, dense networks of relatives, neighbours, and friends provide Panj Ko residents with a functioning traditional social safety net. In these, mutual support embraces both horizontal and vertical social relations.<sup>84</sup> In addition to reciprocal, cost-free loans, households also help each other in other ways: by sharing foodstuffs (especially wheat) and making charity contributions.<sup>85</sup> For example, a few years prior to this fieldwork, Mariam's mother was critically ill after having six miscarriages, and required an operation in the Faizabad Hospital. Miriam's father found that help was waiting nearby:

*When my relatives and the other villagers found out about my wife's operation, all of them gathered and collected money for me [40,000 Af]. I took this amount along with 30,000 Af I had saved from my wage labouring in the village and paid the medical bills...They didn't lend me this money; it was charity and they said that they will not ask for it back.*

The most vulnerable families in the community, such as those of Abdul (CL) and Naim (NCL), receive ongoing attention from other villagers. This comes especially from both close and distant relatives, who provide foodstuffs, clothing, and other supplies that enable the household's survival. Abdul's widowed mother notes that her brother, who lives in a nearby community, sends his children to her home every few days with portions of "everything he buys in Faizabad," including soap, sugar, and oil. He also helps with the costs of their healthcare. Naim's widowed mother, whose four children are all in school, talked about how she receives help through the provision of school supplies for her younger son in fourth grade and daughter in second grade:

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<sup>81</sup> See Table 7 (on pages 50 and 51) for further discussion.

<sup>82</sup> This includes households #1, #2, #3 and #7.

<sup>83</sup> Ibrahim's father has changed his mind since that time, however. His mother relates about their 14-year-old sister, who is currently in sixth grade: "Her teacher says she has good handwriting and that she should continue studying. Her father also says that he wants her to stay in school, and that he won't marry her off. He now recognises that he was wrong in preventing the other girls from going to school."

<sup>84</sup> Horizontal social relations are those between individuals who are of equal or similar socio-economic standing, while vertical social relations are those between individuals of different socio-economic standing (for example, between rich and poor).

<sup>85</sup> Good deeds and acts of charity are believed to provide *sawab* (religious merit) to the giver, for which he or she will receive credit in the afterlife.

*When they need more notebooks and pencils, they cry...and then I hit them to make them stop. Or else a good Muslim comes by and helps us, as the school only gave them school supplies one time this year.*

Panj Ko's wealthy benefactor in Pakistan, Haji Zahir, has also provided all of the ten poor households in this sample with cash assistance (in the form of *zakat*, meaning "alms") during the past few years. The *qomandan* annually distributes this aid to the needy families of the village. In earlier years, each household received 5,000 *Afs*, but recently the sum has been only 1,000 *Afs*.

#### 4.4 Time allocation of village children: CL and NCL

The three general categories of households in this sample (listed below) reveal different ways that village children spend their time each day. They also suggest the numerous decisions (and associated value judgments) that are made about the activities of each child, by their parents, the children themselves and others. To review, the ten sample households include:

Poor households with a focal child who works but does not attend school ( $n = 4$ )

Poor households with a focal child who both works and attends school ( $n = 3$ )

Poor households in which all children attend school and do not work ( $n = 3$ )

The children's major daily activities are listed in Table 5. Although an individual's time allocation varies from day to day, the common routines of these boys and girls (both CL and NCL) keep them busy from dawn to dusk, and include varying combinations of:

1. household chores both inside and outside the compound
2. child labour outside of the household
3. school
4. leisure and play

Table 5: Children's variable daily activities (CL and NCL)

Focal child Identifier	Current labour status	Education history	Typical daily activities
<b>CHILD LABOUR (CL) HOUSEHOLDS</b>			
1. Ibrahim, age 15, male	Only work	No school	<p><b>Grazing livestock:</b> 6 a.m. – departs for mountains to graze other household's animals; 4 p.m. – returns animals to their owner in village (intermittent work for one household)</p> <p><b>Gathering/selling firewood in Faizabad:</b> same routine as Hussein (below), but less often</p> <p><b>Household chores:</b> gathers firewood and water</p> <p><b>Leisure:</b> football on Fridays <i>(Approximately 50 hours of work per week)</i></p>
2. Hussein, age 14, male	Only work	Dropped out of 1st grade (7 years ago)	<p><b>Gathering and selling firewood in Faizabad:</b> 1 a.m. – departs for mountains, gathers firewood, 12 noon – returns home Next day, 1 a.m. – departs for Faizabad; arrives 4:30am, sells wood, stays overnight in hotel; returns to village the next day (carries out this routine every 2 to 3 days)</p> <p><b>Leisure:</b> kite-flying, football, <i>chop-bazi</i> (wood-bat game), marbles <i>(Approximately 50 hours of work per week)</i></p>
3. Nabi, age 15, male	Only work	Dropped out of 5th grade (3 mon. ago)	<p><b>Wage labour (masonry) in Faizabad:</b> 8-hour day w/ lunch break, 20 days (or less) at a time</p> <p><b>Gathering/selling firewood in Faizabad:</b> Same routine as Hussein (above) but less often</p> <p><b>Household chores:</b> gathers firewood when able</p> <p><b>Leisure:</b> football, <i>chop-bazi</i> <i>(Approximately 50 hours of work per week)</i></p>
4. Abdul, age 13, male	Only work	Dropped out of 6th grade (7 mon. ago)	<p><b>Grazing village livestock as village <i>chopan</i>:</b> 8 a.m. – Collects all livestock (30-40 goats, sheep, etc.) from village households; takes them to <i>ailaq</i> (mountain pastures) 2 hours away 6 p.m. returns all animals to their homes</p> <p><b>Leisure:</b> kite-flying on Fridays <i>(Approximately 60 hours of work per week)</i></p>

Table 5 (continued): Children's variable daily activities (CL and NCL)

5. Karima, age 13, female	Work/ school	Currently in 4th grade	School: 9 a.m.-12noon (comes home for lunch) Grazing household livestock: Takes 4 sheep to pastures near village for 1-2.5 hours every afternoon Household chores: collects dung/firewood; fetches water Leisure: garden picnics with friends; lace-making <i>(Approximately 30 hours of work per week)</i>
6. Leyluma, age 13, female	Work/ school	Currently in 6th grade	School: 9 a.m.-12 noon (comes home for lunch) Household chores for others in village: As requested/in afternoons until 4 pm, and Fridays Household chores: collects brush <i>(Approximately 30 hours of work per week)</i>
7. Mariam, age 13, female	Work/ school	Currently in 6th grade	School: 9 a.m.-12 noon (comes home for lunch) Shopkeeping: Whenever customers come in the afternoons (shop adjacent to household) Household chores: sweeping <i>(Approximately 24 hours of work per week)</i>
<b>NON-CHILD LABOUR (NCL) HOUSEHOLDS</b>			
8. Naim, age 18, male	Only school	Currently in 11th grade	School: Walks 1.5 hrs each way to high school in Tel Basang; arrives home in late afternoon; After school: Plays football; catches sparrows
9. Suraya, age 15, female	Only school	Currently in 7th grade	School: 9 a.m.-12 noon (comes home for lunch) After school: Does household chores; makes dung cakes; gives fodder to household cow
10. Karim, age 14, male	Only school	Currently in 4th grade	School: 9 a.m.-12 noon (comes home for lunch) After school: Collects bushes in mountains for household fuel; fetches water and fodder for household cow

## 4.5 Village children who work

### *Children's Ages and Work*

Box 3 lists some of the most common ages at which village children begin to work at various tasks, most of which are farm-related. These ages vary somewhat among individual households, with one father stating that children can begin these tasks "as soon as they won't injure themselves." Not all CL activities are farm related, however; Mariam started to help her father in their small shop when she was 11 years old, and Leyluma proudly relates that she began to do household chores for others "*when I grew up*" (when she was 11 to 12 years old). Indeed, the stage of childhood in Panj Ko is fleeting, and parents generally believe that individuals between 16 and 17 years old are fully reasoning adults.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>86</sup> One mother notes that individuals 15 years of age and under are children without fully developed reasoning abilities (*bei aqel*).

**Box 3: Typical ages at which village children begin various work activities**

Gathering brush/dung for the household (near home)	4-7 years of age (boys and girls)
Gathering firewood/brush (far from home)	13-14 years of age (boys)
Grazing the household's animals	9-10 years of age (boys and girls)
Shepherding flock in mountains	14-15 years of age (boys)
Wage labour in village	12-15 years of age (boys)
Wage labour/selling firewood in Faizabad	13-15 years of age (boys)

***Working conditions***

Table 5 (above) also includes general estimates of the number of hours per week each CL child works, which ranges from 60 hours per week for Abdul (as the village shepherd) to 24 hours per week for Mariam (as a shopkeeper working after school). In general, boys in this sample work more hours (50 to 60) than the girls sampled (24 to 30). The girls are also able to attend school, and the forms of work activities girls are involved in are different from the boys.

In the village context of Panj Ko, adults and children are all traditionally expected to contribute to the ongoing functioning of their rural households to the best of their ability. This often entails difficult physical labour, with long hours of work for both males and females. In addition to their household tasks, many children like those in this sample also engage in income-generating activities. The national Afghan Labour Code has defined the working age as 18 years, while also allowing children 15 to 18 years of age to engage in light, non-hazardous work. The Code prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 for hazardous work. The work week for child workers aged 15 to 18 is set at 35 hours, which is less than the 40 hour legal work week for adults. The institutions that implement these laws and codes are weak, however, and there is a general lack of knowledge among the rural populace (as well as among urban populaces) that such codes exist. Under these circumstances, it is clear that these rural children's work conditions do not conform to the guidelines of the Afghan Labour Code. The following section will examine some of these work-related risks in greater detail.

First, all four of the CL boys included in this sample are engaged in extremely heavy work, and Hussein and Abdul – at ages 14 and 13, respectively – are under-aged. Labouring from 50 to 60 hours per week, they work considerably more hours than the Labour Code permits. In addition, all three of the girls, at 13 years old, are under-aged. Only Mariam's shopkeeping could be classified as light work; Karima grazes sheep, Leyluma does heavy household chores for other households, and both must fetch water and collect dung.

***Perceived risks and hazards***

The working children in this sample and their parents all related a variety of perceived risks and hazards associated with CL activities, some of which are gender-specific; these risks and hazards are summarised in Table 6.

Boys and girls alike are engaged in gathering brush and firewood in the surrounding pastures and mountainsides. In this activity, girls usually stay nearer to the village than boys (less than 30 minutes away); parents (both mothers and fathers) often check up on their daughters, to see that they are nearby and safe. Boys, however, travel more than an hour away from the community to collect fuel both for home use and for sale. All children expressed a fear of possible attacks during the day by animals such as large dogs, foxes,

wolves and snakes. Similar hazards are perceived when a boy takes the long trip to Faizabad with his donkey in the early-morning darkness at 1 a.m., especially if he must go alone. Hussein explained:

*When I'm alone taking the firewood to Faizabad, I feel afraid, but God takes care of me...When you're alone walking in the mountains at night you're afraid of everything. If you see a tree, you think it's a jinn or some kind of monster...I'm also afraid of the wolves. Sometimes when you just hear a dog bark, you're afraid too.*

Table 6: Perceived risks and hazards related to various types of child labour

Type of child labour	Risks	
	For males	For females
Firewood-related activities: Collecting firewood in the mountains ( <i>ailaq</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attacks by dog, fox, wolf, snake, or other animal</li> <li>• Falling</li> <li>• Jinn, especially in dark and when alone</li> <li>• Beating if firewood is taken from other's land</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attacks by dog, fox, wolf, snake, or other animal</li> <li>• Falling</li> <li>• Jinn, especially when alone</li> <li>• Sexual harassment</li> <li>• Gossip and disgrace (for girl, household, or village)</li> </ul>
Travel to Faizabad with firewood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thieves on road</li> <li>• Jinn, especially in the dark</li> <li>• Car accident</li> </ul>	Not applicable
Selling firewood/ staying in Faizabad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thieves in hotel</li> <li>• Smugglers take boy to Iran</li> <li>• Car accident</li> </ul>	Not applicable
Grazing livestock in the mountains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attacks by dog, fox, wolf, snake or other animal</li> <li>• Falling</li> <li>• Beating if animal is lost or injured (<i>chopan</i>)</li> <li>• Villagers will not pay owed amount of wheat/bread (for contracted shepherd)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attacks by dog, fox, wolf, snake or other animal</li> <li>• Falling</li> <li>• Sexual harassment</li> <li>• Gossip and disgrace (for girl, household or village)</li> </ul>
Wage Labour in Faizabad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thieves in hotel</li> <li>• Beating by employer if the boy makes a mistake</li> <li>• Smugglers take boy to Iran</li> </ul>	Not applicable
Chores in Other Village Households	Not applicable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sexual harassment</li> <li>• Gossip and disgrace (for girl, household or village)</li> <li>• Boy and girl may elope</li> </ul>

Injury and even death from serious falls in the mountains are also risks for children engaged in either fuel-gathering or the grazing of animals. Indeed, Karima's mother has never recovered from the death of her 13 year old son ten years ago. She currently over-protects her only remaining son, who is 11 years old; she does not allow him to do any household chores, much less go to the pastures.<sup>87</sup> Karima grazes their household's animals, and she and her sisters gather the household's fuel. Her mother wept when she remembered the tragic accident:

*It was about 10 years ago that my son died – he was 13 years old. At that time we had two sheep and he looked after them. He fell down from a mountain. I remember one day he came back home and I made his lunch – he ate, and then returned to the mountain. A few hours later one of our neighbours came and said to prepare a bed for my son because he had fallen and broken his leg. I asked my daughters to prepare the bed, and I went to find my son, but my brother [met me and] sent me home and told me to wait there...when my brother and my neighbours brought my son home, his body was covered in blood...*

Boys also perceive additional risks related to both grazing and fuel gathering. For example, if the boy is detected when gathering firewood from distant pastures or mountainsides that are not in Panj Ko territory, an angry male adult may beat the boy soundly. Also, if the boy grazes other people's livestock, there is always the risk that he will be beaten or not paid the previously agreed-upon wheat or bread if an animal becomes sick, injured or lost, or if the owners are otherwise displeased with the boy's work.

There are also critical risks and hazards at the village which are specifically related to girls' work outside of the household. Here the issues are primarily social in nature, and related to key sanctions regarding female seclusion in Panj Ko. A number of work contexts are associated with dangers for girls: fuel gathering, grazing livestock or working in other people's households within the village. As noted above, Karima (who lacks an elder brother) must graze her family's two sheep each day. There are many perceived risks associated with this:

*I'm always afraid that dogs or a wolf will attack me. I haven't ever seen a wolf, but I've seen the villagers' dogs...I'm also afraid of the boys, and whenever I see a donkey, I come back home because I know there's a boy nearby...I'm afraid that they will kiss me [or have sex with me] – I'm afraid of that...I've heard about those things.*

Although no one who lives in Panj Ko is considered a stranger, Leyluma's mother shares some similar fears about her daughter's contact with boys as she moves from their home to other compounds in order to undertake household chores for others:

*I'm worried that she'll talk with boys on the way to her work or in the household where she works, and a boy might kiss her [or have sex with her]...Other people may say things behind our backs – or maybe she'd make friends with a boy and escape with him...so I don't let her go to households I think are dangerous...Once a girl gets a 'bad name' among the people, no one comes to propose to her and she will remain unmarried in her father's house.*

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<sup>87</sup> Karima's still-grieving mother related the following proverb: "One who is bitten by a snake is afraid of a rope."

Indeed, Leyluma herself echoes her mother's fears about sexual harassment – not in relation to working in other households but instead in regards to her work collecting dung and firewood in the vicinity of the village:

*I stopped going to the mountains last year when I was in the fifth grade, and now if I'm collecting dung and firewood I do it nearby, next to the gardens. Now I'm grown up, and it's a disgrace for me. There are a lot of valleys in the mountains, and there are a lot of boys out there. If something happens to me, it would be terrible. For example, if a boy comes to me and touches me, or kisses me, people will hear that and they will say, "That girl is no longer good – she was touched by a boy – look at that grown-up girl who goes up into the mountains with the boys!"*

In this tightly knit community of close relatives, gossip is a particularly dangerous and powerful force. Therefore, female adolescents at or beyond puberty must be especially reticent in their behaviour. Rather than go anywhere alone, it is best for them to be accompanied by a sibling or a few girlfriends to protect against any negative comments. The three CL girls sampled in this study are all 13 years of age, and will undoubtedly have to retire soon from their work-related undertakings to preserve the reputations of themselves, their household and their community. Indeed, Karima's mother is caught in a dilemma concerning her fast-maturing daughter and their household's survival through the sale of lambs from their small flock of sheep. She wept as she related her problems:

*I sometimes have arguments with my husband, and I tell him to sell the sheep because he is old and weak and can't take care of them, and Karima is getting bigger. It's not good to send her out to graze the sheep, but we have no other sons to do this work. It's better to sell the sheep. So my husband is thinking about this matter...And when I calm down, he then asks, 'How will we live if we sell the sheep?' I also wonder about this. If we sell the sheep [and then have no more lambs to sell], how will we afford the things we need? These arguments happen whenever I get nervous or worried. You know, I can't forget the death of my son. Now I have stomach problems and also mental problems...I wonder about my life – I'm poor, I have no land, I lost my sons...<sup>88</sup>*

There is another series of risks for the CL boys who travel to and from Faizabad and spend nights in the hotels there:<sup>89</sup> thieves, car accidents, and smugglers. Parents and other family members are more concerned about these risks than the boys themselves are, however. Ibrahim's mother voiced a number of worries about his trips to Faizabad to sell firewood:

*I'm always worried [when Ibrahim goes to the city]. I worry about what he eats, where he stays, and what happens to him – whether there will be a car accident or a cart accident along the way...*

When Hussein undertakes similar work gathering and selling firewood, his father is similarly concerned:

*...there are wolves in the mountains but he does not go alone. There are three to four village children who always go together. There are also jinn in*

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<sup>88</sup> Karima's mother had not only lost one son to a fall in the mountains; a second son had more recently died of cancer.

<sup>89</sup> Room and board at these hotels costs the boys 50 Af\$ per night.

*the mountains and robbers who are taking the wood from the kids and beating them...one man was riding his horse from a village to the city and he was shot by a gunman who took his horse. People found his dead body on the hillside...that's why I'm worried for my son, Hussein.*

Hussein's father also mentioned the risks involved in the overnight stay at the hotel in Faizabad:

*You know, when he can't sell all of the wood in one day he spends the night there in the hotel and, as I told you, there are bad people everywhere. I'm afraid that someone will snatch his money or beat him up for no reason.*

Nabi's elder brother is in his 30s and is especially concerned about the 14-year-old when he is out of the village doing wage labour in Faizabad (sometimes for twenty days at a time):

*Since Nabi has been working in Faizabad we have lots of worries – God forbid that he gets involved with bad people and goes to Iran. He's just a kid, and anyone can easily trick him.*

Nabi however, recalled other hazards that he has encountered while working for a mason in Faizabad as a wage labourer. After his father passed away, Nabi found this job by himself after standing on a street corner in Faizabad where labourers meet to find employment. With tears in his eyes – beginning to sob at the memory of the painful event – the boy related the following story:

*One day I handed the mason a brick but it fell from his hand, and he became very angry. He picked up a piece of brick and threw it at me – it hit my back. I just sat down and started crying because of the pain. After a minute or so, the mason shouted at me to get up—that this is not the time to sit and cry...After that I thought that I should leave this work and go find another job. But then I thought that I probably wouldn't find another job – and I'm in debt with the villagers.*

Parents and children are also troubled by the lack of opportunities for skills training in the types of employment that children these children obtain. This is especially true for boys who are currently employed in Faizabad, where it is the custom that when an individual is engaged in wage labour, he does not learn the skill itself. As Nabi put it, "I don't learn anything because I'm only making bricks from mud."<sup>90</sup> The employer will teach his skill (for instance, masonry, carpentry or mechanics) to an apprentice but the individual is not paid while apprenticed. This precludes any chances for the CL boys from Panj Ko to find apprenticeships, because they must obtain wages for their families. Girls' parents also voice regret that there are no skills training opportunities in tailoring for their daughters at the village level.

In addition, people with skills appear to have little desire to share these valuable skills with others, as Nabi's elder brother has experienced first-hand:

*Carpentry is a good skill [for Nabi to learn] but, you know, people around here don't even teach their apprentices well because they're afraid that if they learn the skill too, there will be competition and the demand for their*

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<sup>90</sup> To the mason's credit, he has asked Nabi why he is not in school, and he saves the boy's wages until he returns to the village (except for 50 Af's per night for hotel room and board) so that no one steals the money. Nabi is also provided with a lunch every day.

*services will decrease. I myself worked in a carpentry shop (in Faizabad) for three years but I still don't know anything about carpentry.*

The above examples demonstrate that the quality and conditions of work for these rural children are often far from ideal. In spite of the parents' concerns and the children's apprehensions, however, these individuals must continue their labours for the general well-being – if not survival – of their households. In spite of the long hours they must work, the numerous risks and hazards that may affect their safety (including accidents and danger of abuse), and the danger of negative social sanctions, the families of CL children have not decided to remove them from their respective jobs.

Nonetheless (although parents do not mention assisting their sons with their labours), in all of the cases of the working girls, parents do occasionally attempt to help their daughters. For example, when Karima's father does not have work, he sometimes accompanies her with their sheep to the nearby pastures; her mother often takes the sheep out in the morning when Karima is at school. Leyluma's father also occasionally helps her tie up and transport the brush that she collects for household fuel. Finally, Mariam's mother notes that when her daughter is busy doing her homework and someone comes to their small shop next to the house, she goes in place of her daughter to handle the transaction.

In addition to risks regarding the physical health and safety of CL children, child labour also has psychological effects. Although this research does not focus upon this complex topic, some issues nonetheless emerged during the detailed discussions with the children themselves. Hussein (an orphan whose father died nine years ago and whose mother has remarried) is now living with his father's brother and family. He works hard there, as the eldest male of his generation in the household, collecting and selling firewood. Although seemingly happy in that situation, he nonetheless also expressed feelings of insecurity. In the research team's discussion with his aunt, she said that he often wets his bed at night. The 14-year-old himself later admitted that he dreams about the many risks associated with his work:

*I always have nightmares. I see in my dreams that I'm falling down a mountain or that a wolf is chasing me, or that a dog is attacking me. And once I had a nightmare that the owner of the tree I was cutting grabbed me and tried to strangle me – I couldn't breathe... Sometimes I scream as I wake up. But when I wake up, I realise that nothing has really happened.*

### ***Children's impressions of their work and their roles in CL decisions***

The impressions that the focal children expressed regarding their present work varied considerably, ranging from acceptance and some degree of pride to utter dislike and despair. In summary, Hussein (who has had little exposure to formal education) appears to be content with his work, but Ibrahim longs for a change and wants to leave the village for the city. Nabi and Abdul (who were withdrawn from fifth and sixth grade respectively) are not at all pleased with their present labours and wish to return to school. Concerning the girls (all of whom are in school), Karima is extremely upset about her tasks, while Leyluma and Mariam appear to enjoy their work. The following section will review some of the CL children's negative responses to their work.

Ibrahim – whose twin brother Ali is described as lazy and irresponsible – is his father's only helper, and he does not enjoy his task of gathering and selling firewood in Faizabad. Sometimes he plans to leave home as his elder brother (who is now estranged from the family in Kabul) did:

*So many times I thought of leaving the village, going to Faizabad and never coming back. Sometimes I think about going to another district and starting*

*wage labour there and being away from my family...I feel like a worker in the household. I feel like my family has given me such a big responsibility – it's like they only want me to work. Ali is free to go anywhere, but I have to work.*

As mentioned above, Nabi is not happy with his wage labour in masonry and does not feel that he is learning anything. Abdul hates his work as the village *chopan* and cries whenever he remembers his school days before his father died. He also believes that he is not learning anything from his tasks and is ashamed of his work:

*Everyone beats me, and teases me, and calls me a shepherd. When the livestock owners beat me, I feel very upset...and my clothes get dirty in the mountains. When I was in school I used to dress in a clean uniform, and I was in second position in my sixth-grade class...*

Karima's mother revealed that that her daughter cries every day and refuses to take their sheep to pasture, saying that she is now grown up. Karima is embarrassed to be herding sheep at her age and is also afraid that she might encounter dogs, wolves or boys in the pastures. With no elder son to do the task, her mother insists that she go, although her father sometimes takes pity on her and takes the sheep himself if he is free. Her grazing activities also appear to sometimes interrupt even her morning schooling:

*I always cry when my parents tell me to go to the mountains. I cry and tell them that 'I don't want to go, I don't want to go, I don't want to go!' But my mother insists. I tell them that I want to go to school, and that I can't be absent on those days when my mother is busy and can't take the sheep...but my teachers understand and they don't count me absent...*

In spite of these severely negative responses from the CL children, extensive physical punishment does not seem to be occurring within the households in this village sample.<sup>91</sup> Ibrahim's parents did, however, mention that they beat their sons when they disobey. Abdul's widowed mother bemoans the fact that livestock owners would beat "an orphan child," but also admits that she sometimes hits her children when they do not behave or when Abdul does not want to go to work. As Ibrahim and Hussein's parents admit, however, parents are also afraid of using physical punishment and of fighting too much with their children over issues related to their work. If they attempt to beat their sons too much or get into serious arguments, the boys could simply leave the household and go to Faizabad, Kabul, or even Iran. Not only would their other family members miss them, but also the household would be deprived of an important breadwinner. Ibrahim's mother has had bitter experiences from dealing with her eldest son in this regard – he left home after an argument, went to Iran, did not make any money, and is now living in Kabul, estranged from the household:

*I sent one of them [her eldest son] to do herding, but [then] he left home...Sometimes Ibrahim now tells me that he does not want to work, but [Ibrahim's father] says that he does not want to say anything to this boy, because otherwise he may just pack his bags and leave too – one of them has left already, and I was very sad.*

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<sup>91</sup> For more details about physical punishment in the Afghan family, see: *Love, Fear and Discipline: Everyday Violence Toward Children in Afghan Families*, by Deborah Smith, AREU, 2007.

On the other hand, some of the child respondents also related that they are content with selected aspects of their work activities and were upbeat in highlighting these positive features. Their attitudes may involve a degree of resignation, but their cheerful responses are worth noting. These positive features of child labour in Panj Ko – primarily described by the children, along with a few comments from their parents – are summarised below in Box 4. For instance, Hussein has no desire to obtain a formal education and enjoys sharecropping with his “father” (actually his deceased father’s brother) and selling firewood in Faizabad:

I like it, because my father orders me to work and I must do it. He needs me to help him – he is alone and doesn’t have any other elder son...I know how to plow the land, sow the seeds, harvest...When my father is not at home, I am the one responsible for my household. And when there is something happening in the village, I’m invited to the meeting where the elders make the decisions.

Due to her work performing a variety of household chores for others in the village, Leyluma has also found satisfaction and a sense of responsibility because she is able to provide basic foodstuffs and supplies for her family through villagers’ payments in kind (such as soap, rice, oil, et cetera). Even in the few cases where people do not pay her at all, she states that she is content to do the work “for *sawab* (religious merit).” After relating that she was happy collecting dung, happy washing clothes, and happy going to school, this enthusiastic girl explained in more detail:

*I’m happy because I want to learn everything and do everything well! For example, the first time I washed clothes I couldn’t do it well and I was ashamed – they [the other household females] laughed at me. But now I know [that task] well. And I’m also happy because I’m bringing something home [from my work]...I’m young and strong – I don’t get tired.*

**Box 4: Some positive features of child labour**

- Provides the child with a sense of responsibility
- Increases the child’s influence within the household and village
- Develops the child’s confidence in interacting with people, and builds self-esteem
- Helps the child develop numeracy and arithmetic skills
- Furnishes an opportunity for the child to socialise with her or his peers

In addition to developing a sense of responsibility through his work, Hussein also related that he has learned some basic numeracy and interpersonal skills by selling and weighing of bunches of firewood in Faizabad:

*From selling firewood in the town I learned a little counting. Now I can count from one to 500, and I also have learned how to sell the wood and how to deal with the customers.*

Similarly, Mariam is pleased with her work assisting her father in their small shop next to their compound, which he says “is according to her own wish.” Her mother noted that their household realised a few years ago that Mariam was good at arithmetic and “good with people.” For this reason, they encouraged her to work in the shop. She and her husband are clearly proud of their daughter and believe that her shopkeeping has also helped improve her school work. As her mother said:

*Everything Mariam sells, she knows its price. She's learned to keep things in her mind – it's now like a fast calculator. And her arithmetic lessons [at school] are going very well.*

Finally, many of the CL focal children related that they enjoy completing various tasks because they are often in the company of their friends – people they have known all their lives, who may also be close relatives. As mentioned above, these children usually do not undertake their activities alone, because of various risks. Instead, they work in gender-segregated peer groups. Although Karima does not like her work grazing livestock, she does not mind gathering bushes and dung in the afternoons after school, because she has the companionship of other girls:

*On the way home from school I ask my friends if they're planning to collect bushes and dung. If they say yes, I go too...my friends all meet at my house and then we go collecting dung.*

Boys also take pleasure in their work when they can relax and have a bit of fun. On the long trips from the village to Faizabad to sell firewood, in the darkness of the early morning, Hussein and his friends have found something to laugh about and pass the time:

*I have three friends. They're very good boys. They always join me on the trip to the city...Sometimes my friends get sleepy and they fall off their donkeys, and we all start laughing at them.*

In summary, it is difficult to generalise about the children's opinions regarding their work: some enjoy their tasks, but others do not. Similarly, the participation of individual children in the decision-making process regarding their work also varies. Although other adults in their households and community make the final decisions, the youngsters' opinions and desires sometimes also play a role – however minor – in the process. Their voices are included in discussions, and parents are aware of their feelings (both positive and negative). Adults usually have the final say, however, as to whether the children work or not.

### *Leisure time*

Although the days of these children are filled with various productive pursuits, most boys and girls do occasionally find time for relaxation through group activities with peers of their gender. In their leisure time, boys play football, fly kites and enjoy other leisure activities near the village. Meanwhile, girls get together for small garden picnics or for lace-making and embroidery sessions in each other's homes. Attending village weddings is also an especially enjoyable way for all of these adolescents to spend their time socializing and enjoying a good meal.

Not all children have much opportunity for group activities, however, as 13-year-old Abdul (who was withdrawn from sixth grade and now works as the village *chopan*) explained:

*...sometimes I play with rocks and build little houses while I'm in the mountains...beautiful houses, small ones...I don't have any books to read there, but if I did have a book, I'd read it.*

Because the village is considered safe territory in which there are no strangers, parents condone group play activities if their children have successfully completed their other work-related tasks. However, both fathers and mothers strongly object to their children "just walking around the village here and there," wasting time or quarrelling and fighting with others. This applies primarily to boys, and some fathers fear that too much free time can lead boys to adopt "bad behaviour such as gambling, stealing, drinking and running after girls." Girls have stricter social sanctions that restrict them from leaving their

households without some specific purpose and/or destination. However, it is also not considered good for a girl to only be “sitting at home free and idle.”

A few parents (especially fathers) also stressed the importance of work for its own sake, for both sons and daughters. Karim’s father, head of an NCL household, shared this opinion:

*I prefer my children to go to school, but it’s also good for them to learn how to work when they are children too: fetching water, collecting firewood, cutting wheat, making dung cakes, [and] herding animals in the mountains. These are our routine activities in the village, and children should learn them; when I was a child I also learned these things.*

#### **4.6 Key aspects of child labour-relevant decision-making processes in Panj Ko**

The above discussion demonstrates that although economic factors – such as household debt and the absence of an employed head of household – play a central role in decisions regarding child labour in Panj Ko, poverty is not the only factor involved. Indeed, all of the ten households sampled in this study are poor but not all of them employ child labour. As reviewed above, the residents of Panj Ko value education highly, and parents send almost all of their sons and daughters to the local community school. Indeed, school enrolment and attendance is standard in the village, and girls are able to attend school while working in close proximity to the community. The children who only work and do not attend school are all boys, and they are the exceptions to the rule. The decision-making processes involved in this issue are extremely complex and involve both economic and social factors. The following section will examine some basic elements of household and community dynamics in Panj Ko, in order to “understand in greater detail how synergies between economic and social operate at the micro level.”<sup>92</sup>

##### *The role of the community in decisions to withdraw boys from school to work*

Two of the households with CL boys – Nabi and Abdul – have experienced crises with the deaths of the boys’ fathers, resulting in the withdrawal of the boys from school. Interestingly, in both of these instances, the larger community of Panj Ko has been the major decision-maker along with the secondary participation of the boys’ household members. Without any economically active adult male, both families are extremely vulnerable; in these situations, the community’s substantial social support system has been called into action. This demonstrates both community and household risk management strategies at work.

Before reviewing the two individual cases in more detail, it should also be noted that the staff of the Panj Ko school generally discourages the withdrawal of children from school and works with households on an individual basis to retain both boys and girls in the institution. As Karim’s mother noted:

*The teachers don’t allow children to quit school...they tell the parents that if they want to pull their children out of school, then they have to go to Faizabad to submit the documents there for permission.*

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<sup>92</sup> Naila Kabeer, “Deprivation, Discrimination and Delivery; Competing Explanations for Child Labour and Educational Failure in South Asia” (Brighton, UK: IDS Working Paper 135, Institute of Development Studies, July 200), 26.

### *The Case of Nabi*

Nabi's household is staunchly religious; this is reflected in the fact that Nabi's elder brother must remain at home for an entire year after the death of their father in order to greet the many guests who come to condole the household's loss. With his elder brother (who is married and has three pre-school children) unable to work, Nabi was withdrawn from fifth grade three months prior to this project's fieldwork and currently works both through wage labour in Faizabad and by gathering and selling firewood in the city. Another elder brother in their household is currently enrolled in Islamic studies in a madrassah in Pakistan, and is anticipated to return someday soon to become the village *imam* (religious leader).<sup>93</sup> The death of Nabi's father – which involved an expensive funeral and an ongoing period of mourning – put the household in a serious debt of 70,000 Afs, to both villagers and teachers. This debt includes not only the *sar-i-aura* (the money distributed to all attendants at the burial), but also the *dou'a-i-khan* (the monthly prayers and feasting for the dead person that continues for one year). Nabi's elder brother recollected the process of withdrawing his brother from school:

*First I went to the school and talked with the teachers [about taking Nabi out of school], and they told me to gather the elders of the community to make the decision. [Then] I went to the head of the shura and he called all the elders of the village together. They all gathered at the mosque, including the teachers. They also called my brother, Nabi, to take part in the assembly. All of them then made the decision for him to leave the school for one year and start to work to support the household, because I could not leave the house for a year. People would otherwise say that the house was without a head.*

Nabi's efforts are paying off, and three months of his hard work have now reduced the household's debt to 40,000 Afs. As Nabi himself says, "I had no alternative." He hopes to be able to return to school once a year has passed and his elder brother is able to resume work as a wage labourer.

### *The Case of Abdul*

Abdul's father (before he passed away six months ago) was the contracted village *chopan*, who took the flocks of many of the villagers to the *ailaq* every day. After his father's death, Abdul was withdrawn from sixth grade (along with his elder brother, who had also been in sixth grade) to complete his father's annual contract.<sup>94</sup> These boys have two younger sisters who remain in school, and there is also a toddler in the household. Abdul's widowed mother receives a great deal of moral support from her brother, who lives nearby and also shares foodstuffs with Abdul's desperately poor household. The family is related to the village *qomandan*,<sup>95</sup> and occasionally receives assistance in the form of food or clothes from other households in the community. During her interview, Abdul's mother fatalistically recalled what happened after her husband's death:<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> After completing seventh grade in Panj Ko, Nabi's brother was the recipient of a scholarship from the village's wealthy benefactor, Haji Zahir. He now studies at a madrassah and weaves carpets in Haji's factory in Peshawar. No remittances are sent home, however, and (in order not to upset him) the boy has not been told of his father's death.

<sup>94</sup> See Table 7 ("Two Vulnerable Households (CL and NCL)" on pages 50 and 51) for more information about Abdul's case.

<sup>95</sup> The *qomandan* is Abdul's mother's uncle's son, which is a social asset.

<sup>96</sup> Abdul's mother also stated that if the WFP Food for Education programme had continued, she would not have had to withdraw her boys from school. (See page 12 for more information on the FFE programme.)

*In the beginning, my sons were weeping and saying that they wouldn't take the flocks to graze. Then the elders and villagers advised my sons and convinced them. [They did this] because they feel sympathy for us. They would otherwise wonder how we could survive if we had no one working in the household.*

*It's our custom that whenever something happens to a family, like a death, people get together and help. When my husband died, people came to condole and to feed us. They came on the third and seventh day after the death, and then they would also advise and encourage my boys to graze their flocks... Whatever comes to a person, he has to do it.*

Abdul, who longs to return to school when his yearly contract is finished, also remembered how the community was involved in convincing him to take up his father's work:

*When my father died, my uncle [his mother's brother] along with many people from the village came to my house and told me, 'Son, you will have to continue your father's work or otherwise no one will be able to support your family.' I didn't say anything; I just cried, and said that I wanted to keep on studying...but then I thought, no one will listen to me, so...I was obliged to give up school and begin to work.*

In the cases of both Nabi and Abdul, a complex mix of economic and social factors was involved in the decision-making processes that withdrew these boys from school and sent them to work. In order to help these exceptionally poor households survive, the community provides social support in the form of sympathy and companionship, along with other assistance such as food.<sup>97</sup> There appears to be, however, a limit to such support beyond which the household itself must take part (for instance, through child labour). This is despite the community's emphasis on the importance of education for its youth. For example, in Nabi's situation, the household is indeed in debt to the villagers and teachers themselves. In the case of Abdul, the flocks that he must take to the mountain pastures every day belong to the villagers. It appears that the leaders of the community have had to sacrifice – temporarily, hopefully – the education of these two boys, in order to promote the survival of their individual households *and* to preserve village harmony.

#### ***Household composition: Birth order, gender and orphans***

The issues of gender and household birth order influence the work status of all of the focal CL children from this study in one way or another. In Panj Ko (as in other Afghan settings and throughout many parts of South Asia),<sup>98</sup> there is a long-standing tradition and ideal that the eldest son should work to help to support the household. It is this individual's responsibility, and he must often sacrifice his desires for the good of his younger siblings.<sup>99</sup> Ibrahim is the eldest male in his home,<sup>100</sup> with six younger siblings (three girls and one boy

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<sup>97</sup> Contributions to poor households such as these are considered to be *zakat* (alms), which provides *sawab* (religious merit) to the giver.

<sup>98</sup> Eric Edmonds, "Understanding Sibling Differences in Child Labour," *Journal of Population Economics* 19, no. 4, (2006): 795-821.

<sup>99</sup> It could also be argued that the eldest daughters traditionally must sacrifice for their other siblings, too, through their early marriage. Indeed, in our sample of ten households, a total of five eldest daughters have married very young, with their natal households obtaining much-needed *qalyn* (bride price) in the process.

<sup>100</sup> Ibrahim's twin brother is described as lazy and irresponsible, and does not work as regularly as Ibrahim does. Ibrahim himself says he has no interest in education, and his father also notes that "his mind does not work well...he is not suited for studying..."

who are in school; the remainder are too young for school). His mother calls attention to the fact that, if he had not worked, "I don't know how the others would have had a chance to survive. We don't have land, we don't have crops, we don't have animals...we have nothing." Similarly, Abdul's widowed mother described how her elder sons must sacrifice for their three younger siblings (two girls who are in school and one pre-school boy) through their labour:

*In order for the smaller children not to go hungry, the bigger ones will have to work...once the small ones are older, then they can go back to school and study...[the boys] will work now because they have to [pointing to the sleeping baby]. If they don't work, then these little children will be hungry...the girl can go to school, but the two boys have to first make the others' stomachs full, and then secondly they can go to school.*

Hussein (an orphan) is also the eldest male child in his household, with seven younger children in the household (three girls and one boy who are in school; the remainder are too young for school). His real father died ten years ago, his mother re-married, and his father's brother took him in "as his own son." The household chose Hussein, who was the elder sibling, as "part of the deal"; Hussein's younger brother went to live with his paternal grandmother. Hussein is known throughout the village for being an extremely hard worker, gathering and selling firewood, and helping his "father" (uncle) with sharecropping.<sup>101</sup> He "works like a demon," according to one neighbour. When the boy's "mother" (aunt) left the room during the interview, this female neighbour quickly related the following about orphans such as Hussein:

*Hussein has to work hard, otherwise he would have stayed hungry. If you don't have your own father, your uncle will not care about you [unless you work hard]. No one gives you food free of cost.*

In general, the three girls in this CL sample are involved in child labour because they lack brothers of a suitable working age. For example, in Karima's case, two of her elder brothers died at the ages of 18 and 13, and her mother is consequently over-protective of her one remaining son, who is ten years old. Karima, her remaining brother and her three sisters all attend school. After school, in the afternoons, Karima must graze the family's sheep. Her mother said, "I send her [to graze the sheep] because I have no other son to send to do this work." Karima's father continued in more detail:

*There's a lot of pressure on my daughter because I don't have elder sons to help me in the herding of livestock and the collection of firewood. So Karima has to do work inside and outside of the house to help me and her mother...along with going to school.*

Leyluma, meanwhile, cheerfully goes to other households after school to complete various chores and collects dung from the hillsides because she realises that her parents need her help. She has four sisters (one who is married and two of whom are also in school) as well as two pre-school aged brothers. Leyluma maturely stated:

*I understand that we're poor. When I look into my parents' faces, I can see their sadness. My parents only had us girls, so I went out to work.*

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<sup>101</sup> Hussein's uncle states that "he's a dull boy and it's his own decision not to go to school;" his aunt says that "his tongue is like wood."

After school, Mariam takes care of her father's shop with pride, but her mother relates with sadness that "her father only has one daughter." After Mariam was born, the woman had six miscarriages and had to have a hysterectomy. Her husband commented about this:

*It was the biggest shock for me when I learned that my wife would have no more children. I became so disappointed because I didn't have any son. But now I consider my daughter, Mariam, my son because she's helping me all the time.*

Three orphans also live in this household, but their situation is quite different from Hussein's (which is described above). Mariam's father's brother died ten years ago, and his wife re-married; two boys and one girl from that household (all of whom are in school) now live with Mariam and her parents. Miriam's mother stated that all four children are treated as equals, and when new clothes are bought, her father always "buys for the orphans first because he does not want them to be upset." None of the other children work in the family's shop; this seems to be a privilege reserved for the household's own biological daughter.

Diversification, a strategy in which one child or some children from a household work while others attend school, appears to be common; it is a strategy that all of the male CL units employ. Parents carefully weigh the costs and benefits of both work and school, and also take into consideration a child's individual characteristics and abilities. For example, this widow described her plans for the future and provided some interesting details about Abdul (who is 13 years old) and his brother (15 years old), both of whom are currently serving as village shepherds:

*If my elder son can't go to school in the future, then Abdul should go to school. One of them should work on the land as a farmer, and the other one should study. Nasim is elder and is physically stronger than Abdul, so he should be a farmer. Abdul is clever and can communicate easily with others, so I'd like to send him back to school. For example, when we go to any gathering, Abdul can talk easily with others. This afternoon we're invited to a wedding party; I'm sure he will go and eat his fill. But his brother is shy...It's impossible that both should not work and go to school. If so, how will we live?*

### ***Negative and positive social sanctions***

Factors such as village norms and standards, along with gossip and concerns about "what people will say," are also important considerations in regards to child labour in the socially close-knit and physically compact community of Panj Ko. For example, as discussed above, many negative social sanctions limit the work activities of post-pubescent girls in the public sphere. The following are a few additional illustrations of this dynamic, all provided by female respondents. Abdul's widowed mother is proud that her sons have assumed their roles as village shepherds. She was apprehensive about what the neighbours would think if they had not worked and was worried about how this could reflect negatively upon herself. She believes that when the neighbours now see her sons going to the hills to work:

*They say 'Oh, those poor boys are so ba khairot (responsible). They took their father's job – and are doing their duty – they are taking care of their family!'... If they did not do this, the neighbours would then say that this is the fault of the mother.*

Hussein's "mother" also takes into consideration the opinions of her neighbours and encourages him to work especially hard. Somewhat jokingly, she said, "I tell him to go to the mountains and bring more bushes so that the neighbours will be jealous!"

On the other hand, Leyluma's mother confesses that their patron (a powerful commander for whom Leyluma's father works as a contracted labourer and farm manager) does not want the girl to work outside the household doing other people's chores because it will reflect negatively upon him:

*The girls hide their work from the commander; he does not like them to work. He says 'It should not impact on my reputation.' So when we see his car coming, we call everyone home... People of the village will say that Barat [the commander] does not look after this family properly and the girls have to work outside the household.*

In addition, some parents are concerned about their children's future opinions regarding their upbringing, and this influences decisions about whether or not their children work. For example, the widowed mother of Naim (from one of the NCL households in this sample) has two sons and two daughters, all of whom do not work and are currently in school. She is fearful that her children would judge her negatively in the future if she compelled them to work and did not allow them to continue their studies. She explained: *When they grow up, they will ask me why I took them out of school. They will criticise me and demand to know why I didn't let them study.*"

#### 4.7 What is special about the non-child labour households?

In the context of this isolated village in Badakhshan, some poor households – such as the three NCL units included in this sample – do not require any of their children to work and send all of their children to school. What are some characteristics of these NCL households in comparison with the CL units included in this case study?

##### Box 5: Some general characteristics of NCL households and parents in Panj Ko

- Desire for children to acquire new skills
- Education of a parent in the household (only one father)
- Successful trips by adult male household members to Pakistan and Iran for employment
- Less debt than CL households,<sup>102</sup> and no mortgaging of their land
- More verbalised desire for salaried jobs
- More reference made to distant places, schools, universities
- Positive role models of successful educated individuals
- Greater consideration of children's opinions and desires about work and school
- Bitter experience of a parent who made her or his child work in the past
- Parents' sacrifice, work, and ability to face present difficulties<sup>103</sup>
- Different perceptions of risk than CL households

<sup>102</sup> See "Table 4: Household debts, credit providers, and reasons for debt" on page 29. In contrast, four of the CL households have had to mortgage their small plots of land in recent years.

<sup>103</sup> This refers to a parent's ability to successfully "hustle to survive" in the often precarious context of rural Afghanistan, according to: Ian Christophos, *Out of Step? Agricultural Policy and Afghan Livelihoods* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2004), 27.

Table 7: Two Vulnerable Households (CL and NCL)

HOUSEHOLD WITH CHILD LABOR (CL)	
Head of Household:	Widowed Mother of Abdul ( Household #4)
Household members:	6 (mother and 5 children) Father died 7 months ago (due to illness)
Decision:	<b>Child labour</b> Abdul (age 13) was withdrawn from 6th grade when father died, to take over his father's contract job as village <i>chopan</i> ; brother (age 15) similarly withdrawn; sister (age 10) and brother (age 5) remain in school; 2-year-old brother in poor health
Decision Made By:	Community (neighbors, elders and the <i>qomandan</i> ) Mother's Brother Mother
Rationale:	No one to support family; Abdul must fulfill father's year-long contract, with payment in wheat and bread; food aid no longer distributed in school
Father's work:	Casual/daily laborer; village <i>chopan</i>
Father's aspirations:	"While their father was still alive, he always said that he would work hard so that the children could study. He did not wish them to be illiterate like him"
Mother's activities:	Household chores; sells eggs occasionally; barter bread payments for vegetables, tea, sugar, oil, etc.; cannot weave rugs or embroider; has never looked for job in the village, but would like to work
Abdul's Mother:	"In order for the smaller children not to go hungry, the bigger ones will have to work...once the small ones are older, then they can go back to school and study."
Abdul:	"I'm not sure if I'll be able to return to school next year or not. We don't have anything in the house to eat...I'm always thinking about this: how will we eat and how can I support my family. (Weeps.)"
Aspirations for the future:	Mother wants Abdul to be a teacher and move the family to Faizabad; she says, "We can rent a house there..." Abdul wants to be a teacher or a doctor, and have a car.

Box 5 includes a list of various factors associated with the NCL households included in this study. Not all of these characteristics are present in all NCL households but together they form an array of features that are associated more with the NCL households than with the CL units sampled in this study.

As further illustration of these NCL-related factors, Table 7 ("Two Vulnerable Households...") on pages 50 and 51 contains two brief household profiles and contrasts a pair of extremely vulnerable units: the CL household of Abdul's widowed mother and the NCL household of Naim's widowed mother. Both units have faced the serious shock of losing their head of household to illness, and each has responded in different ways; one began using child labour and one did not. Both households value education and believe that it will lead to productive employment.

Table 7 (continued): Two Vulnerable Households (CL and NCL)

HOUSEHOLD WITH NO CHILD LABOR (NCL)	
Head of Household:	Widowed Mother of Naim (Household #8)
Household Members:	5 (mother and 4 children) Father died 4 years ago (due to illness)
Decision:	<b>No child labour</b> Naim (11th Grade), walks 1.5 hours each way to high school in Tel Basang; his two younger sisters (ages 14 and 8) and one brother (age 10) all remain in school in village
Decision made by:	Mother
Rationale:	Education will lead to a good job; "When they grow up, they will ask me why I took them out of school. They will criticize me and demand to know why I didn't let them study."
Father's work:	Salaried job (1500 Afs per month); baker in government office
Father's aspirations:	"Their father said they should study, but then he died."
Mother's Activities:	Weaves rugs, makes mud stoves and ovens, tailors (has a sewing machine) for others; teaches children Quran; sells eggs for her children's school supplies.
Mother:	"If Naim did not go to school then he could work to buy rice, oil, wheat, and pay for all our expenses. But now he goes to school, so I work..."  "If there is one egg to sell, I will sell it...or I will do other people's work and I will buy (school supplies)...I accept the difficulties, and hopefully their future will be bright...Naim has only one year left so I'm saying that he should go and finish it."
Naim:	"When you've sent me to school, then let me stay in school."
Aspirations for the Future:	Mother wants Naim to go to the university and be a teacher; "A teacher earns a salary every month; he earns 2500 Afs per month, and can cover his life expenses. In ten years he will have made thousands; he will eventually have 100,000 and then he can marry."

However, while members of the community (neighbours, elders, and the *qomandan*) were involved in the decision that Abdul should work because of the nature of his father's contract, Naim's mother herself has primarily decided that Naim should remain in school and not work. Naim's mother fears future criticism from her children if she were to take them out of school. In addition, her deceased husband held the only salaried job referenced in this entire sample; Naim's mother recalls the security that this provided their household and hopes that her educated children will be able to achieve similar salaried positions. This woman is also involved in numerous income-generating activities in an attempt to allow her children to remain in school: rug-weaving, making mud stoves and ovens, tailoring, teaching the Quran and selling eggs. In contrast, Abdul's mother has never looked for work in the village. Naim's mother also takes her son's desire to study into consideration (more than Abdul's mother does) and notes that he has only one year to study prior to his graduation from twelfth grade.

In addition to the characteristics illustrated in the two NCL household profiles included in Table 7, the following section will consider some additional examples of the factors listed in Box 5. In the case of Karim's NCL family, Karim's eldest brother (who is 22 years old) has recently returned after working successfully for two years as a wage-labourer in Iran. He came back to the village with a red Iranian carpet, two blankets and enough money to construct a new guest room in the family compound. This brother is now a wage labourer in Faizabad, and Karim's father (whose other five school-age children are all enrolled) is proud of him:<sup>104</sup>

*My children should finish their schooling. Their eldest brother is paying for all of their school expenses...When he brings notebooks and pencil sharpeners to them, they become happy. I'm pleased too that he's working so his siblings can get a good education.*

Furthermore, reference to successful educated individuals as positive role models is prevalent in NCL households. In two out of the three NCL households, brothers of the heads of household are currently employed as teachers in the city of Faizabad. Karim's mother (whose own brother is studying in Kabul with a scholarship from the village patron, Haji Zahir) wants her children to be like him and like their father's educated and successful brothers in Faizabad:

*If my children are literate they will be able to find a good job. Their paternal uncles are all literate, and they have a good life.*

Suraya's father, who is a fifth grade graduate, calls attention to other more distant and successful educated role models for his school-going children:

*As you know, Ustad Rabbani got his education and is now a leader of Afghanistan, and Karzai got his education and he's now the President of Afghanistan.*

Some NCL parents, such as Karim's mother, have also gone through painful experiences in the past when their eldest children left school in order to work, and so now they are striving to keep their other younger offspring enrolled in school. This mother of nine children bitterly remembered the experience, with tears in her eyes:

*One year my son didn't go to school because we decided to send him shepherding...I was obliged to do so because I didn't have anything in the house...But then the next year we sent him back to school so he wouldn't fall too far behind. We spent our days in difficulty, but at least we sent him to school...But he never finished his Quran study, and whenever I think about that, it makes me so sad...Yes, that's the reason I send the other children to school now; I don't want to see another incident like that in my life ever again!*

In summary, these NCL households appear to have somewhat different perceptions of and responses to risk than their CL counterparts. They are somehow better able to cope with the many day-to-day insecurities that confront the poor in Panj Ko. Ongoing livelihood considerations of all households in this sample involve "a continuous trade-off between opportunities in the present and future."<sup>105</sup> The risk management strategies of NCL households may not always provide immediate returns, however,

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104 Karim's father also commented: "I'm always asking my children about their homework, and thus I'm learning the things they learn right along with them!"

105 Adam Pan and Sue Lautze, *Addressing Livelihoods in Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2002), 15.

such as short-term wage labour opportunities. Instead, they focus more upon longer-term security to be obtained through the education of their children. Karim's mother continued:

*There aren't any good work opportunities around here...if there is any work, it's only wage labour, and this is only for a week or so. And I don't want to take my sons out of school for just one week and then have them lose their education...I say they must study to have a bright future!*

#### 4.8 Aspirations for the Future

Parents and children from both CL and NCL households have high hopes for the future of the younger generation, including both boys and girls. In all cases, these hopes involve further training and/or education that is not currently available in the village of Panj Ko. In this respect, these rural inhabitants feel that they are very much a part of the larger context of their province and nation, and they expect positive professional and financial returns for their ongoing investment in children's education. When asked about their aspirations for their children, parents want them to have "a bright future," "to become somebody" and "to have a salaried job." Interestingly, the ideal career choices are the same for both their sons and daughters and include (in order of preference): teacher, doctor, engineer, clerk in a government office, school principal and veterinarian.

Individuals note that for both genders (but especially for girls), becoming a teacher or doctor would enable them to return to Panj Ko after their education and live with or near their birth families while serving the community. The children themselves have similar career aspirations, with girls choosing their teachers as very positive role models; as Karima related: "We have only two female teachers in the school here, and they teach us everything. I'd like to be like them."

Villagers are also clearly aware of the daunting obstacles that face village youth in seeking further education, beyond what is now available for them in Panj Ko; villagers desire this education beyond ninth grade for both sons and daughters. Still, many express optimism even if the local school is not upgraded to a high school as anticipated. Mariam's father stated, "If I can afford it, I will send her to Faizabad to graduate from twelfth grade." Her mother, whose sister lives in the provincial capital, has a plan for all four of her children:

*I will work, and their father will work, and we will send them one at a time to Faizabad. When one graduates, another will go. The graduated one will help us pay for the next one...they will not all go at the same time.*

Karim's mother is similarly positive about her son's future:

*We will trust in God. He will help us... Some boys in this village who have finished ninth grade here are studying in Faizabad. They have a room there. Their parents send them money, and they study in the city. So if my son would like to go to the city, he can stay with them. Then his father would be responsible for sending him money to study.*

However, for the four CL boys sampled in this study – none of whom are now in school – their futures are quite indefinite, as they are unmistakably aware. Both Nabi and Abdul long to return to school after one year of work; their families are supportive but unsure of these plans. Both want to be teachers or doctors, but Nabi is also thinking of becoming a carpenter or a driver if formal education is, in fact, unattainable. Ibrahim and Hussein, who lack any formal education whatsoever, both want to find apprenticeships in Faizabad, make money and "have a car" in the future.

Although Hussein's "father" values formal education for his other four sons and three daughters, he states that his deceased brother's son will have to "remain a shepherd." The boy's "mother" has plans for Hussein: after he grows a beard, he will someday marry "*an uneducated girl like himself.*" She continued:

*The girls of today say that they will never marry anyone who is uneducated...a literate person would never accept to marry Hussein...*

Indeed all parents, especially mothers, call attention to the importance of arranging "good marriages" for their sons and daughters. Matches are preferably made with others within the village or with relatives in Faizabad. However, the comments made by Hussein's mother call attention to this fact: when village boys in Badakhshan are required to work rather than enrol in school (as is the case in this small sample), and girls of their peer group do attend school, choice of marriage partner may become problematic. For example, ironically in the Afghan context, there are no girls of school-age in this sample who are not currently in school but some boys are not enrolled.<sup>106</sup>

In conclusion, in spite of the high hopes expressed by adults and by youth, the CL children in this sample – both male and female – are clearly aware of the many difficulties involved in being able to achieve their dreams and exhibit a mature assessment of their future possibilities. Hussein himself faces the realities of his household's economy vis-à-vis his own future:

*If the economic situation of our household gets better, then maybe I'll be able to learn a skill [e.g. apprenticeship in masonry, carpentry, or mechanics] in Faizabad... [It] can improve if we can produce more wheat, or if I go somewhere to work as a wage labourer. If our condition does improve, then maybe I can go and be an apprentice somewhere. This is my only hope. Otherwise, if it gets worse, I don't think I'll be able to.*

Similarly, Leyluma looks towards the future and wisely reflected on the hurdles of both gender norms and poverty:

*I'm a girl...and thus I can't go to a city to continue my education. If I go to the city, I need to rent a room and we don't have money for that. And I'd be alone there, and I'm not familiar with the city so I don't think I can...I wish my father had enough money, but he doesn't.*

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<sup>106</sup> For more on this topic in Badakhshan, see: World Food Programme, "Sarghailan Girls Search High and Low for Educated Husbands," [www.wfp.org/newsroom/in-depth/asia/afghanistan/050505](http://www.wfp.org/newsroom/in-depth/asia/afghanistan/050505) (accessed 16 April 2008). In Badakhshan, according to this article, "...many boys have to drop out of school in order to help their parents provide food for the family, while girls have a better chance of finishing their education."

## 5. Conclusions

This case study has reviewed, in detail, the various factors that influence decisions regarding child labour in the close-knit rural Badakhshan community of Panj Ko. The poor village household is extremely vulnerable to a variety of risks which are out of its control, including drought (which could result in crop failure, serious illness, death of family members, et cetera). In this insecure environment, households develop risk management strategies; in some cases, these include child labour. Options for work – both on farm and off – are sporadic and seasonal in nature in both the village and the distant urban centre of Faizabad. This results in a situation of general underemployment, in which Panj Ko residents are constantly searching for work to make ends meet.

In this atmosphere of uncertainty, poverty plays a clear role in the dependence of some households on the labour of their children. However, other issues – of a more social nature – are also involved. Local social networks in Panj Ko are strong and feature: traditional social support mechanisms that provide credit sources; emotional and material assistance in the event of birth, marriage, illness and death; and, in some cases, community-based decisions regarding school enrolment and child labour. The local village school is extremely successful, and almost all children – both boys and girls – are enrolled. Due to gender-specific work types, however, village girls are able to combine school and work while boys – who must work in the mountains and/or commute to the provincial capital of Faizabad – cannot. With regard to birth order and gender, eldest sons and girls from households that lack males of suitable working age are most often called upon to work.

As compared with CL households, parents in NCL households are slightly better able to cope with the daily insecurities that confront the poor in Panj Ko, through more intensive and more varied work activities. They have had more exposure to the outside world (within Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan) and make more frequent references to positive role models who have found success through education. Finally, they take into consideration the opinions and desires of their children more so than those parents whose children labour.

Villagers in Panj Ko – both those who send their children to work and those who do not – clearly realise the importance of schooling for both sons and daughters and consider education a primary means for their offspring to find valuable employment and related economic security. Panj Ko has a striking lack of options for education beyond ninth grade for both boys and girls, however, and a subsequent lack of viable employment opportunities in both on-farm and non-farm undertakings, meaning that these aspirations for children's education and secure employment may be left unmet. To this end, government efforts to improve education and create more job opportunities must be increased and perfected in order to ensure that rural Afghans' optimistic aspirations for their children can be realised.

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