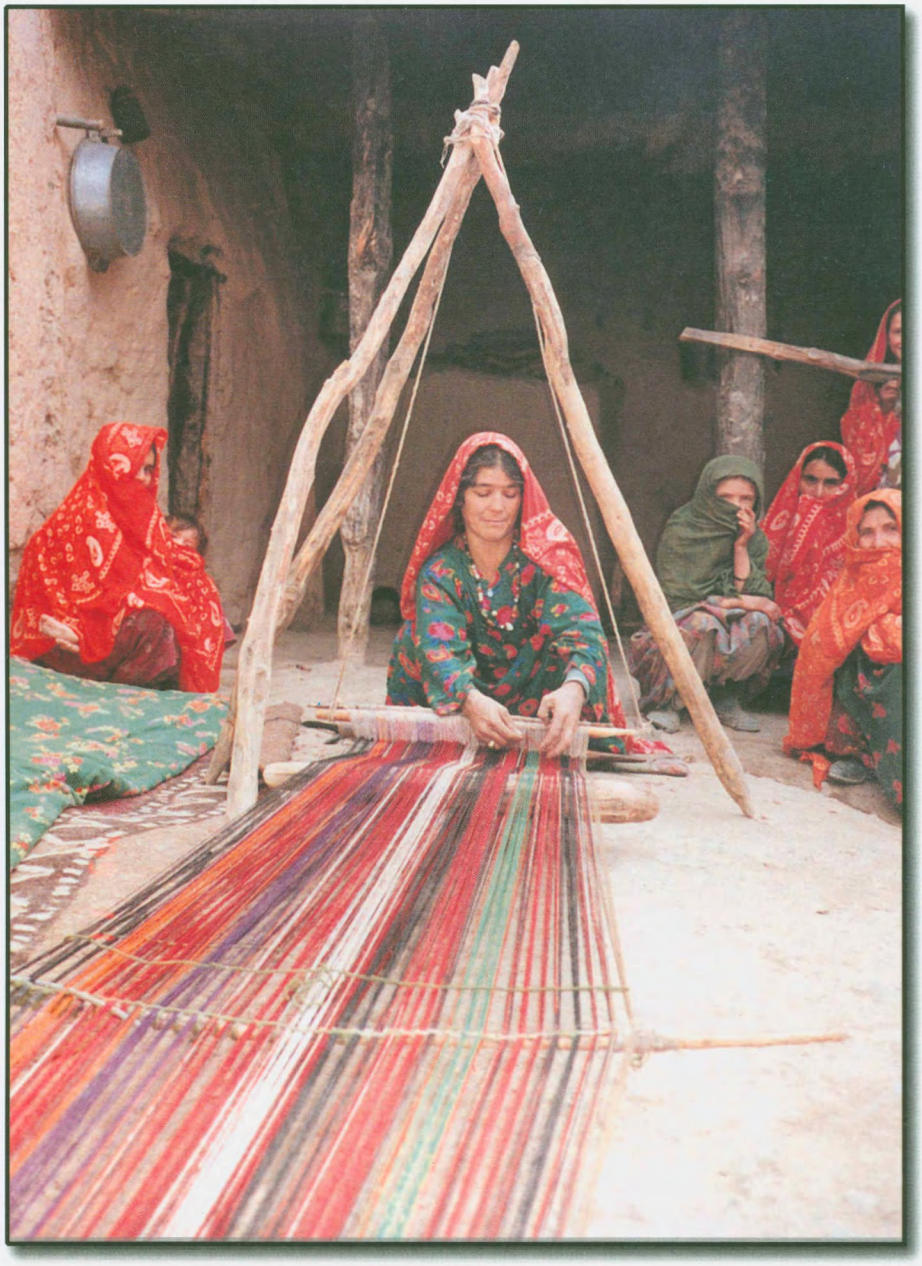
SMU Area Reports

BADAKHSHAN



AFGHANISTAN SMU

SMU Area Reports

BADAKHSHAN

Strategic Monitoring Unit, Afghanistan
May 2001

Printed in Pakistan
The Army Press, Islamabad

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Badakhshan is the only province in Afghanistan still fully in control of the United Front. Pockets of insecurity caused by inter-factional fighting are a problem in some areas and have inhibited agency activity. Further instability has arisen as the frontline has neared Faizabad. The Taliban capture of Taloqan caused a wave of IDPs and increased the difficulty of getting supplies into the region, with consequent shortages and a steep rise in prices. Faizabad, the capital, sees some of the highest prices in the county – a product of its geographical and political isolation.

Social and Community Structures

The population is comprised mainly of Sunni Tajiks but with a substantial minority of Ismaelis, mostly concentrated in particular areas - Shegnan and Eshkeshem are almost entirely Ismaeli and Wakhan and Zebak more than 90% so. There are also other small minorities. Relations between groups are generally good.

The social relations of villages are rooted in the old order and to a large extent the traditions have survived the upheavals brought about by the communist government, though traditional leaders have less power than they once had. With the rise of a military leadership, the old separation of military and civil affairs has broken down. Taxes are no longer systematically collected, and the government structures that do still exist function at a very minimal level and have almost no budget. Faced with a lack of provision from the government, communities rely on village-based traditional systems of support to make sure that at least people's most basic needs are met. Yet despite the strength of these support mechanisms, there are fears that the drought of 2000 has in some places stretched them to breaking point. Villages try to solve conflicts at a local level, and then if this fails they invoke higher authorities.

Much of the area's cultural heritage is under threat. People spoke of how music and culture had stopped, stories were not taught to children like they used to be and Faizabad library no longer existed.

Situation of Women

The situation of women in Badakhshan whilst by no means good, is on the whole better than in other parts of Afghanistan. However, an increased conservatism can clearly be seen and this most affects urban women. Educated women were proud of their heritage, the fact that women worked at all levels and could even be elected to Parliament, and they were aware of loss. The loss has come from the gradual deterioration in opportunity brought about by a worsening economic situation and an increasingly conservative environment. Women dislike having to wear the burqa, but it is not seen as an essential issue. What is far more important is that war has brought poverty and women have suffered greatly from it, their lives reduced to an endless quest to find enough food for their children. Women worry too about the lack of education and what this will mean for their children and for the future. Yet for a few women the situation has also delivered the right to work and with it an increased self-esteem and greater rights within the family.

For rural women there has been little change. Education opportunities are few because there simply are not schools to go to. Health care in many areas is non-existent. Life is basic and it is hard.

Security

The key factors to affect security in Badakhshan are the nearness to the frontline and the relationship between the local commanders - where major commanders have good relations security is good. Inter-factional fighting was often greatly resented by the community, yet it did not seem to make a great difference to their daily lives. In general people felt they could travel safely and that the problems only affected those connected with the factions. The area around Keshem (which is close to the frontline) was where people spoke most strongly about security problems. People greatly resented the fact that one of the schools was occupied by soldiers and that the town was full of weapons. The biggest issue, however, was the conscription of young men to fight on the frontlines and many fled the area to escape this fate. For those who had to fight, mines were a major hazard and the greatest source of injury.

Livelihoods and Food Security

Even in the 70s the economic situation in Badakhshan was considered precarious and the province has always been food insecure. The

combination of a low agricultural base, limited returns on livestock and lack of other earning opportunities has always meant that many families struggle to survive. Agriculture is mainly subsistence farming, people grow to meet their own needs and have little to sell. Wheat is the main crop and rainfed cultivation predominates. Livestock seem to have diminished in importance, except in Wakhan. Very few families can meet their food needs solely from agricultural activities and casual labour is vital to make up the deficit. For most families this means leaving the village, often to Pakistan or even further afield.

The growing of opium poppies has a long history in the province but only some areas grow poppy, whilst other areas equally suitable do not, and only some areas have high levels of addiction. The areas that grow and the areas that consume are not necessarily the same. Production fell in 2000 due to a number of reasons.

The Lapis mines present a potentially significant source of wealth to Badakhshan but production levels are currently low as primitive technology means mines fill up with stones. Working conditions are terrible.

The destruction of the environment is a major concern in Badakhshan, with very direct and serious repercussions for people's lives. Increased farming of pastureland has led to degradation of the land and reduced the ability of the slopes to absorb water, with consequent increases in flooding. The reduction in tree cover has resulted in the search for fuelwood becoming a major undertaking and villagers reported spending an extraordinary amount of time in this activity.

Drought

In 2000, what is generally recognised as being the worst drought in living memory swept through Afghanistan. Although Badakhshan was less affected than some areas of Afghanistan, any reduction in crop is serious in such a chronically food insecure area, although just how serious did not become apparent until spring 2001.

Reliance on rainfed production makes the province very vulnerable to drought and in 2000 the problem was exacerbated by the fact that the casual labour markets also collapsed. The reduction in casual labour was to some extent offset by FFW, but not sufficiently. Drought not only affected crops but also severely affected grazing. Many pastures grew poorly due to lack of rain, dried out early, and were heavily over-grazed. By spring 2001 Ragh and Shar-i Buzurg were seeing hunger-related deaths and displacement.

There are also serious long-term problems as a result of the drought. Many families have now lost all or most of their assets and incurred new debts. Badakhshan is also suffering from severe seed shortage. At the time of autumn planting in rainfed areas, many farmers did not have enough seed and therefore either did not plant or were only able to plant with poor quality seed. A credit problem has developed with farmers unable to repay past loans or obtain new loans for either consumption or seed.

Education

Education is highly valued in Badakhshan, particularly amongst the Ismaeli communities, and children will often walk for many hours to get to school. The lack of education was often mentioned as one of the biggest problems facing people. Yet despite the positive attitudes to education, levels of literacy are appallingly low – for women rates are under 2%, and even for men they are rarely more than 10%. Shegnan is the striking exception to this, with a high level of literacy for both men and women, which has nothing to do with agency involvement as there has been little agency activity in this remote district.

Like so many other things, education is the victim of war. In Keshem, the area closest to the frontline, one of the schools was taken over for IDPs, another as a barracks – much to the disgust of the local population. But it is not only on the frontlines that there is a toll, the war has meant that government departments no longer function and education is no exception to this. Few teachers get any pay from the authorities, and the few that do get little. Salaries, or some form of remuneration, for teachers is one of the major issues in terms of education strategy. There are also major questions over the quality and appropriateness of provision at all levels.

Although theoretically girls can go to school, lack of provision severely curtails access, especially in rural areas.

Lack of opportunity beyond grade 12 is seen as a serious problem, and this has got worse over the years. In part this is due to aid agency policy, for whilst a number of agencies will support primary schooling and a few secondary, almost none support tertiary. Tertiary education has also been hit by the closing down of opportunities beyond Badakhshan, particularly, but not only, for girls.

Health

Health services in Badakhshan are extremely limited. Of the 45 villages surveyed for this report, only 11 had a clinic within an hour or less by donkey. For eight it was 2 days or more. Many people simply cannot reach the facilities. Even where there are facilities, usage is low. Key health problems are malaria, TB, respiratory infections, diarrhoea, measles and whooping cough. Malnutrition was widely acknowledged as a problem, and Faizabad had the highest acute malnutrition rate of all cities surveyed by ACF in 2000.

Health care for ante natal and post natal women is extremely limited, women have frequent pregnancies and often suffer from poor nutrition. Although statistics are hard to come by, it would appear common both for women to die in childbirth and for there to be a high level of infant mortality.

Opium addiction is a problem in a number of places, not only in itself but because it takes scare resources away from meeting the need for food.

Access to clean water is extremely variable and access to sanitation almost universally poor.

Agency Activity

There has been a long history of agency involvement in Badakhshan, although the pattern is uneven with some districts having virtually no activity. Despite the fact that some agencies have made a deliberate effort to work in remote areas, there is still overall a concentration of activity in areas accessible from roads.

Most agencies believed that information sharing between agencies working in the province had improved, but that there was still some way to go in terms of real co-ordination. It is clear that (as in most places) issues of agency profile have sometimes got in the way of good co-ordination, and this is true of both NGO and UN agencies.

Communication problems between the staff based in the field and staff at the country programme office have also been an issue for a number of organisations, and this has compounded the co-ordination problem. This is exacerbated by the fact that many organisations do not have senior staff in the field in Badakhshan. Different operational bases add to the difficulty.

Lack of senior staff input into Badakhshan has had an impact on quality. This has long been a problem but in 2000 it was made worse by the scale of the crisis in Afghanistan. Many agencies were over-stretched and need proved beyond agency capacity.

On the whole agencies are seen as having a positive impact on security. It is not clear, however, whether this lasts beyond the immediate life of the project.

In terms of overall impact, the most worrying aspect is that there is no agreed long-term strategy in any of the key sectors (though individual agencies might have their own). There is no coherent agricultural strategy and work in this sector is piecemeal and uncoordinated. The lack of co-ordination and leadership will seriously inhibit recovery programmes. There is also no clear strategy in relation to environmental issues or to rangeland management, no comprehensive policy in relation to livestock, and very little understanding of how the urban economy functions - and thus of what opportunities there might be for intervention. Health coverage, although good in places, is very uneven, with many parts of the province having no provision. Although recently increased support has been given In terms of materials and teacher training, and this is to be welcomed, there is as yet no overall strategy for education. Key questions of the appropriateness and quality of provision, and of support to, and remuneration for, teachers urgently need to be answered.

Introduction

The Strategic Monitoring Unit

The SMU is an independent research unit with a management board comprised of NGO, UN and donor representatives. Its objectives, as agreed by the Afghan Programming Board (May 2000), are to undertake research and analysis in order to help the aid community gain a better understanding of the broad impact of its programmes in terms of:

– improved livelihoods,
– access to basic services, and
– progress on human rights, including gender rights.

The SMU was one of a number of ideas that arose from the recognition that aid agencies were failing to work together to address some of the root problems of Afghanistan. The need for such an initiative was recognised in the Strategic Framework (SF) and Principled Common Programming documents (PCP). The SMU was seen as the analytical capacity that would monitor, from an independent standpoint, the overall direction and impact of assistance strategies in the country and whether or not the new initiatives of the SF and PCP were in fact making any difference.

The Area-based Studies

This study is the first of a series of area-based reports, which aim to build an analytical baseline from which to plan, and against which to chart, the evolution and effectiveness of the assistance effort. It is hoped that they will stimulate creative thinking and greater co-operation amongst agencies on the ground.

The work takes as its starting point the premise that Afghans are, like all human beings, entitled to certain basic rights: economic, social, political and civil. Thus one important measure of the success of the aid effort is the extent to which it helps Afghans to realise these rights. The studies aim to pull together information on the current situation regarding these rights as a starting point from which agencies can measure future progress. They suggest indicators that can be measured, or at least assessed, but also try to give enough of the history and context to make these meaningful. Whilst data from earlier years is patchy, the report attempts to identify trends rather than just giving a snapshot. Although useful now, the greater value will be realised once a number of years of data have been built up and we can more clearly trace changes and begin to understand the relationship between them and the assistance effort.

Methodology

In designing this study three factors were taken into consideration:

– the need to gain a reasonably accurate picture of the key factors affecting the quality of life of the inhabitants of the area;
– the need to do this at a reasonable cost;
– and the need to do this in a way that would lay the basis for an ongoing system of data collection.

Three main sources of data were used for this report: published reports; unpublished records of agencies; and the gathering of new data. The latter was done between September and December 2000 and covered 15 districts. Some districts were left out because of their remoteness – it would have taken 15 days just to get to Darwaz centre and 4 to 6 weeks to complete a reasonable number of interviews. Others were omitted because they were small districts similar to others already being surveyed.

Data in Afghanistan is notoriously unreliable. The last census was in 1979 and was aborted part way through because of the war and, as in most parts of the country, there has been no attempt in Badakhshan to do a systematic population survey since that time. Any overall statistics are therefore at best guesstimates. For this study, population figures for villages were obtained by multiplying the number of households by the average family size of seven. Numbers of adults were estimated as half of the total population, as most informants considered half the population to be under 15years. These assumptions are in line with those generally used in Afghanistan, but clearly only yield approximate figures.

The last province-wide report to be issued was the UNIDATA report of 1992, but because of the war this contained many omissions. Since then there have been some attempts to get data at a local level in Badakhshan but these studies are either topic-specific and/or only cover particular locations. What

we have, therefore, is a patchy picture, giving us insights into aspects of the problem but not an overall analysis.

In drawing on data from other sources, problems were encountered in comparing figures as district boundaries have changed and different agencies record different information in different ways. Villages, and even sometimes districts, can go under more than one name. These are noted at the back of the report, along with abbreviations and local terms. The measurement of land in particular is complicated – although reports will often quote in jeribs (one fifth of a hectare), and sometimes even in hectares, these forms of measurement mean little to farmers. Afghan farmers either measure their land in terms of sers planted[1] or use local local measures which vary from place to place. Yields are normally given as sers harvested per sers planted.

A questionnaire (Appendix F) was completed on the basis of village level interviews. The interviews on average lasted between two and three hours. The sample villages were chosen with care to reflect the differences found within a district and findings were cross-checked with the understanding of those who knew the districts well. Even so, as the sample is small (45 villages) great care must be taken in making generalisations from the data and averages should be treated as indicative rather than as absolute figures. Although in general the data is presented in the main report at a district level, at times it has seemed more meaningful to show the range of values to be found between villages in a district, rather than averages. All the village level data can be found in the tables. Village interviews were supplemented by semi-structured interviews with key informants at a district level.

Various indicators have been used to try and get a measure of levels of poverty, of livelihoods, of health and education, and of access to services. There has also been an attempt to capture the civil and political rights situation, including issues of governance and of violence and security. These are harder to develop indicators for as they are not well captured by quantitative measurement and qualitative measures are open to easy manipulation. Whose story do you choose to tell? We tried to talk to a range of people, male and female, of different ages and from different sectors of society. We cross-checked information and our understanding of that information.

Badakhshan

Badakhshan is one of the most remote and least developed provinces in Afghanistan. It is situated in the extreme north east of the country, with external borders to Tajikistan in the north, Pakistan in the south east and, at the far end of the Wakhan corridor, China. The border with Pakistan is open (and indeed due to its long and mountainous nature would be impossible to effectively close) as is the border with China. The River Amu delineates the border with Tajikistan and this is firmly closed to legal traffic in people and goods and is patrolled by Russian border guards. This closure has severe economic consequences for the province, but smuggled goods, particularly opium, cross in a highly organised and lucrative trade.

Internally the province borders Kunar, Laghman, Takhar and Kapisa. In the far north east the Wakhan corridor, a mountainous tongue of land that juts out from the rest of the country, is a relic of the British Empire's desire to separate its territory from that of the Russian Empire. In the south the Hindu Kush effectively cuts off Badakhshan from the rest of Afghanistan, the only road being the steep Anjuman Pass which leads over into the Panjshir Valley. Strategically this route has become very important, being the main supply route for Massoud's base in the valley. Communications inside the province are difficult due to the mountainous nature of much of the terrain and although roads have recently been much improved by numerous FFW projects, many of them are still closed for up to six months of the year.

Faizabad is the capital of the province, an impoverished city vulnerable to food supply failure. Half a century ago it was very different; then it was a place of trade and of culture with writers, poets and musicians. The small population benefited from a lucrative trade in carpets, silk, handicrafts and pistachio. There was little agriculture and the mountains were covered in forests. Then trade declined, people moved into agriculture and started to cut down the trees and to farm the rainfed land.

[1] In Badakhshan the average seeding rate for irrigated land is estimated to be 5 sers per jerib and for rainfed land between 2.0 and 2.5 sers per jerib (Focus).

During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, troops were stationed in Faizabad and the city remained under government control. It stayed this way until the fall of the Najib government in 1992, though by that time it was largely cut off from its hinterland and was experiencing sporadic conflict. There was also a Soviet garrison at Zebak, and close control over some district centres, but with the exception of those that bordered the Soviet Union most of the rural districts had by 1990 gone over to mujahedeen control. Jamiat-i-Islami and Hizb-i-Islami were the most important groups with Hizb-i-Islami controlling most of the strategic areas in the early 90s. The commanders were, however, never part of a unified force and were split by many rivalries, a pattern which continues to this day.

The area suffered less direct damage from the war than many parts of Afghanistan and relatively few people became refugees. Nevertheless, the parts controlled by the mujahedeen still saw frequent air attacks and there was significant damage to buildings. By 1990 it was estimated that only one third of school buildings escaped damage and no health centres were intact.[2]

Hermione Youngs

Buzkashi Faizabad

[2] UNIDATA 1990

Social and Political Profile

THE BROADER PICTURE

Current Political Situation

Badakhshan is the only province in Afghanistan still fully in control of the United Front and is the home base of Rabbani. Since the mid 1990s the area has largely belonged to Jamiat with pockets of Hizb-i-Islami. However, internal tensions within Jamiat between Rabbani and Massoud, and commanders allied to one or the other, frequently give rise to pockets of insecurity.

In December 1998 the chief commander of Argu, Kheradmand, who had been appointed Governor of Badakhshan was killed and this led to a period of fighting. The Argu commander and governor retaliated against the Faizabad military forces but the Government forces proved to be stronger and an uneasy truce has followed.

Further insecurity occurred in 1999 when Massoud appointed two commanders to control the main access area of Keshem. Both wanted sole control, and the commander controlling Teshkan bridge, the major route from Faizabad to Keshem and Taloqan, was killed. This has resulted in a total split in support and many of the minor commanders cannot move around freely, although the Taliban's capture of Taloqan in September 2000 has stopped it developing into open fighting. Even more significant was the killing in November 1999 of Najmuddin, the most powerful commander in Badakhshan, on the outskirts of Baharak. The resulting increase in instability is still evident. Najmuddin controlled not only the military personnel on the main access routes to Tajikistan and Pakistan but also the flow of funding from the revenue of the lapis mines. Since his death there has been a noticeable increase in local inter-factional fighting, especially along the lapis mine control route.

Further instability has arisen as the frontline has neared Faizabad. The Taliban first captured Taloqan (in neighbouring Takhar Province) in August 1998, but at that time they only held it for a few weeks. They then took it again in September 2000 and have kept it since, though they have lost some of the surrounding territory they captured at that time. The capture of Taloqan caused a wave of IDPs, some of whom came to Keshem and others to Faizabad. Assessing numbers was difficult as IDPs moved a lot and mixed with the local population, whilst a number of the local population tried to pass themselves off as IDPs. Most of IDPs from Taloqan were from the urban area and their situation varied. Some were able to transfer their business to Keshem, others were able at least to bring significant household assets with them, whilst still others had limited resources. They found shelter in local houses and in schools, in public buildings and in temporary shelter outside. Assistance programmes were mounted to meet immediate needs. As the situation stabilised many of them moved back, although some tried to get to Tajikistan.

The capture of Taloqan and of a number of areas on the Tajik border has increased the difficulty of getting supplies into the region. The result has been that whilst the military continue to get what they need, especially fuel, communities go short and prices have risen. Fuel continues to come over the river from Tajikistan and food from Rustaq comes by donkey, through Shar-i-Buzurg to Faizabad. As so often, the issue is not so much that there is nothing to buy but rather that prices have risen way outside most people's reach. The borders with Tajikistan and Pakistan are long and porous and supplies are likely to always get through; but the harder it becomes, the more essential supplies will get diverted to the military, the more prices will rise, and the more the civilian population will become impoverished.

The long-term future of the area remains uncertain. Throughout 2000 there were persistent rumours of commanders in the area who might go over to the Taliban. As so often in Afghanistan the flow of money from out of the country is likely to be more important in determining the future of the area than any battles fought. In this respect sanctions, imposing as they do a one-sided arms embargo, will clearly have an effect on the balance of power – what exactly that will mean for Badakhshan is as yet uncertain.

Social Structures

The population is comprised mainly of Sunni Tajiks but with a substantial minority of Ismaelis, mostly concentrated in particular areas - Shegnan and Eshkeshem are almost entirely Ismaeli and Wakhan and Zebak more than 90% so. There are also Hazara, Uzbek, Turkmen, Kirghiz, Nuristani and Pashtun minorities but they are very small. Relations between groups are generally good, despite occasional attempts to use the ethnic card to drum up support for the war.

Hermione Youngs

Music Shegnan 2000

If some government people come to the schools, immediately they start saying Pashtuns want to kill all the Tajiks, they bring divide between the people of Afghanistan. Some of the people here they listen to them, and some they laugh. I'm an Uzbek, I have a lot of friends who are Pashtun and Tajik and I like them very much. This kind of thing will have a very negative effect on the minds of children. Now it is dangerous for a man to say Pashtuns are our brothers and we should live together. I am frightened. I have 36 years experience in education, and if it's impossible for me to say this kind of thing to students imagine how impossible it is for others.

In Baharak, where the district centre has a population of about 10,000, one of the community leaders described the situation:

Everyone is Sunni, Uzbeks are maybe 1000 families, Pashtun, only in centre, 400 families, the rest are Tajik. Since several decades they [the minority groups] are here. One hundred years ago Pashtuns came, and Uzbeks more than that; now they are relatives, there are no problems, they think they are Badakshi.

Other districts reported similarly, the lack of problem perhaps being in part due to the fact that minorities were so small that they posed no threat to the dominant population:

There's a Tajik majority [in the province], also Uzbek and Pashtun; but all are together. Also with Ismaeli and Sunni, there are no problems. In the whole district only 4 or 5 families are Uzbek and also very few Pashtuns, they don't even count as a percentage; 99% are Ismaeli. (Eshkeshem)

The social relations of villages are rooted in the old order and though the detail varies between Ismaelis and Sunni Tajiks in essence the systems were similar. Villages had an arbab[3], who was the representative of the community. The community was said to 'select' the arbab, though in fact he always came

[3] In other parts of the country these can be known as 'khan' or 'malik', the role is the same

from a landed family. He was the link to the governor and without the support of the arbabs it was impossible for the central authorities to govern. Some of the bigger arbabs were also elected as members of parliament. Arbabs had responsibilities for resolving disputes and undertaking negotiations on behalf of the village, they also had a social responsibility to provide a guesthouse where visitors could stay and eat. The office was a secular one (though the person inhabiting it would no doubt be a practising Muslim). Mullahs in those days were respected but had no power outside the religious sphere.

With the coming of the communist government, relationships changed. All across the country the khans, maliks and arbabs were collected together and killed, and Badakhshan was no exception. Their land was distributed to the 'poor' - though in reality this often meant to party people. In place of the old system co-operatives opened up, but the head of the co-operative, a party man, also acted like an arbab and it brought little benefit to the people. Meanwhile, a number of arbabs fled to the mountains, from where they would demand that the farmers brought all the produce to them or they would be killed. According to informants many farmers were killed in that way. To escape from the tyranny some people fled to Pakistan and to the border areas.

Yet, to a large extent the traditions have survived the upheavals, though more strongly in Ismaeli communities than Sunni ones. The Ismaeli communities have their own structures, which run parallel to state structures. There is a Shah, who also has a religious role, and who in theory is selected by the community, although often this is a hereditary position. The Shah is a representative of the Aga Khan and takes his words down to the village level.

These systems have often been built on by assistance agencies as ways in which they can reach communities and deliver aid. There have been attempts to build more permanent institutions on the old, looser structures:

Some NGOs made community shura inside villages, e.g. OPS, these are not related to government. People agree with these, participate in meetings, talk about work.

Yet although some of the structures and ways of doing things have remained, travel and modern communications have opened up people's horizons:

Another big difference is that in the past nobody was interested in political issues, they didn't even know who is governor, who is king. Now everyone knows politics, what has happened in the world, what has happened in Taloqan. Even the poor owners of donkeys, they tell each other, 'this has happened', they always know the political issues of every day. Now even our children know. Around 30 years ago parties made strikes, people listened, but they didn't know, now they have radios. This is better, the people know something, finally they will find the right way to go.

Legitimacy and Governance

This shift is seen in the way traditional structures, though largely nominally still in place, no longer function in the same way, and in the rise of a military leadership. The automatic granting of authority to key figures in the social order no longer exists, a feature many informants noted with regret - a nostalgia for the past which is perhaps in part response to the uncertainty of the present.[4] One respondent from Baharak described it thus:

In the past, when I was very small, a policeman could go to a village according to the command of the woluswal, and that single policeman could bring all of the people to the governor's house. And when woluswal was walking past everyone hid themselves. Now there has been a lessening of respect. Now it's not possible to call the community without a big force to come here. Now it is possible for everyone to come and talk to the woluswal.

Before the war things were seen as having been regulated, with clear lines of responsibility stretching from the community right up to the central government. The woluswal was under the governor of Badakhshan, who in turn reported to the Ministry of Interior, who then was responsible to the Prime Minister. The way of talking about it - 'before the coup, step by step everything was followed,' - showed a satisfaction with a sense of order. People

[4] Exactly the same sentiments were expressed in the Hazarajat study.

Hermione Youngs

Food for work distribution

spoke of how every office had budgets and plans and reported to the woluswal, and he in turn to the governor. Taxes were paid to the government through a tax office under the control of the woluswal; the system was said to be 'structured'. The districts (or sub districts) had only one commander, who was in the security office and under the control of woluswal. Everything was seen to be done properly.

Before the coup taxes were collected on land, and an office of tax collection was responsible for this: 30,00Afs per year per jerib, to the bank. It was set against budgets, there was a system of reporting. But now it all goes to private pockets.

Then there were functioning structures of government, for public health, education etc, and a separation of the civil and the military. Not any more:

Now he who has most force wins; and everything is mixed together, military and civil. Before if [there was] fighting between two people, then the criminal office would solve problem, now they cannot do. They are jobless, just a name'.

There used to be an amir, and when he ordered people obeyed; and there was split between military and civilian, the two were not connected and ordinary people were busy and there was no problem.

The changes started when the military and civil were deliberately brought together as part of the organisation of the fight against the Soviets. It was not at that time seen as a bad thing:

Before the Islamic government this structure was made to fight against the communists. All the mujahedeen were under one control in south east Badakhshan, civil and military, and the military helped the civil.

The mujahedeen were generally seen to have behaved properly in those days, unlike the government of the day and unlike the present situation:

In the past the different commanders of the mujahedeen collected usher and used it properly, but now the commanders don't use properly, they just keep for themselves. But some give to poor people. It started to change after the Russians. After the Islamic revolution, after the mujahedeen took

the upper side, they sent a message saying that the commanders should not collect. And I read this, and after that the commanders did not take from the people. But now commanders sometimes take from the people by force. People tell the commanders to go away: 'I have nothing, I have an ox and you have a kalash, let us go to the frontline together. I have nothing else to give you (Keshem).

Mostly, though not always, the local commanders are part of a loose chain of command going up to Rabbani or Massoud. The situation, however, can be extremely fluid and subject to rapid change. Commanders are not necessarily seen as illegitimate, rather their legitimacy depends on how they behave. In any case, they are part of the structure of society and little can be done without their agreement. Although many are involved in illegitimate activities such as the drug trade, they also need the support of the people and can be initiators of positive development projects, sometimes financing them themselves and at others trying to attract the assistance community. But although a few individual commanders are seen to behave well, the overall system is seen to be corrupt and self serving, with most of the monies collected going for military purposes and very little for running services.

Meanwhile, the government structures that do still exist function at a very minimal level and have almost no budget. This lack of resources for services inevitably has an impact on the way officials are viewed:

I am the governor, I have no resources to help the people, all I can do is bring this NGO or that NGO'. (Baharak)

And the legitimacy of the authorities is not helped by the fact that people are rarely paid:

For six months, one year, people have not been paid; then Rabbani comes and people hope for pay, but then he will only pay the commanders.

KEEPING GOING

Support Systems

Faced with a lack of provision from the government, communities rely on village-based traditional systems of support to make sure that at least people's most basic needs are met. If the needs cannot be met at village level, then the system ensures that the problem is sent up to the next level, although now agencies are often seen as the giver of last resort, the final backstop to the system.

In every village there is a representative; and that representative will identify the poorest people and send them to the woluswal, and if the woluswal has resources he will help and if not he will send to [Commander] Sadar, or ARC or FFW. (Baharak)

Between villages the support mechanisms vary, sometimes they seem to work in a horizontal fashion with support going directly between villages, at other times higher authorities are involved.

In Rabat village a bad flood came and destroyed the irrigation channels, and they sent bulldozers and rice, wheat and ghee. And in Khush Darya, again a flood came, and the woluswal sent rice to help re-build the intake. Or in some cases they will write official letter to governor of Badakhshan to help. For example, in this area people are very poor, and they wrote to governor, who wrote to ICRC and they brought FFW. At the moment they [the authorities] have very limited resources, they are a link between the community and supporters. (Baharak).

Yet despite the strength of these support mechanisms, there are fears that the latest drought has in some places stretched them to breaking point. Now even the 'wealthy' have nothing to give.

Conflict Resolution

Villages try to solve conflicts at a local level and then if this fails they invoke higher authorities, including commanders.

First the elders will try to solve. If they cannot manage, then it will go to woluswal and then finally to the court, or maybe the commanders.

If there is a problem between two families in the village then there is a good system for solving the problem. First the elders come together, then if they cannot solve it then the khalifa, then the shah – and shah absolutely will solve. (Eshkeshem).

It was felt by some that there was a strong will at a local level to avoid problems, and it was this that led people to accept the decisions of the elders:

In every village there are some elders, and the people of Keshem they are calm people, they don't want to raise problems, so they will accept the idea of the elders. For example, some days ago in Sarai village there was a big problem and one or two mawlawees went and discussed and finally they succeeded – because these people they don't want to make problems.

In Faizabad, however, informants said there was:

no solving of conflict - it's all military.

Culture

Shared traditions help bind societies together but these have been under attack, especially in the urban areas. Music in particular has suffered:

Men singers don't sing in Faizabad, but in the villages they do. In Faizabad it is only at weddings, and then they need an order from the government. People still tell stories but they don't teach songs; children still draw.

Music and culture have also stopped. [In the past] people would listen to musical cassettes, have videos; now they are not even taught musical instruments, before they had groups at school. Stories are not taught to children like they used to be.

Family involvement in poetry, stories, music and songs is decreasing. Though it may not be as strict as the Taliban, nevertheless, the 'present Islamic state does not encourage music'. Poetry and writing seemed a little more acceptable. Poverty has also taken a toll and often people spoke of how, 'when people are hungry, they do not have time for music'. Although buzkashi, partridge fighting and dog fighting continue, the public library that once existed in Faizabad is now destroyed. Elderly people in Faizabad spoke of how the arts and stories from the Pamir were all gone, how once people shared stories and poems but poverty and lack of employment had destroyed it all:

Now the kalashnikov has replaced music.

Hopes

Yet despite all the problems people continue to believe in a better future, even if they cannot see from where it will come.

Hermione Youngs

Music in particular has suffered

After the dark God promises two lights, we are waiting for the light to appear.

They [the people] know absolutely that peace will come, but they don't know when, maybe 10 or 15 years.

And, somewhat amazingly given the history of the last 20 years, there was still a faith that the outside world could help:

It depends on the developed countries, on the UN and the neighbour countries. If they want to solve it, it will be solved, but if they leave it to the people of Afghanistan it is not possible. We hope they will come here to solve this problem. But this direct involvement should be honest. If they bring the king back he is a very old man but people accept him. If they bring technocrats from the West, the fighting will solve in one week. Most of the people value Zaheer Shah. The past traditions are alive, as much as before. Both women and men have traditions. With wedding parties they both have their own traditions, singing songs etc, and with death also.

For the praying men and women come together. People know Zaheer Shah is Pashtun but they know he will not be driven by ethnic issues, people will get jobs because of skills, not because they are a brother of a Pashtun. Now family members with guns support the commander, but if Zaheer Shah comes, people will stop their support for the commander and the commander is finished. But now they support the commander because otherwise they think things will be worse, more dangerous.

There is still a plea:

Bring peace to this country, stop this disaster in which we live.

VIOLENCE AND SECURITY

The Security Situation

Interviewing about security, one became aware of a whole mixture of sometimes conflicting opinions. The key factors that affect security are the nearness to the frontline and the relationship between the local commanders – where there are good relations between major commanders security is good, where there are problems it is not. Yet what was interesting was the extent to which people said security was good,[5] despite the existence of inter-factional conflict. It seemed that in talking about security, people drew a clear distinction between security for ordinary civilians and the insecurity that affects those connected with the various party factions. The inter-factional fighting was often greatly resented by the community:

People don't like it, they hate it, they would kill the commanders if they could.

Yet the resultant problems were largely seen to affect people with connections to the parties rather than ordinary citizens.

It is all very peaceful except for going to Kalafgan, where sometimes people loot. Before the revolution also this road was not safe. For ordinary people it is safe to travel, even for women; it is only a problem for the commanders.

Also, even in villages where there had been recent fighting, such as Hazrat-i-Sayyed in Jurm district, interviewees generally said security was good. What they meant was that security for outsiders was good; village disputes that sometimes resulted in people being killed were not, it seemed, viewed as 'insecurity' but just as village tensions. Yet these tensions significantly affect agency work. For example, NAC could not implement its 2000 education programme in Jurm because the two sides of the town were fighting, nor could they undertake projects in Khash and Darayam because of insecurity.

The area around Keshem (which is close to the frontline) was where people spoke most strongly about security problems. Security breakdown was generally seen as a product of war, both in relation to the immediate fighting and the pattern of the last 20 years:

Before there was a proper system for the controlling of the community, but when the fighting started, after that some problems occurred. Now in Keshem centre there is security commander, but just in the centre they control, not one kilometre further.

People worried about bombardment, about the possible arrival of the Taliban, the fact that one of the schools was occupied by soldiers, and about a town full of weapons.

People are afraid of the gunmen in the town. Schools are closed because they are used as barracks. Soldiers come wanting to 'hire' boys. The boys don't want to go but they threaten the family with guns at night, saying, 'where are your boys'?

The (mis)use of the school outraged people. It 'was changed to a military bastion' reported one. This more than anything else was seen as an unacceptable infringement of the military on the civil rights of ordinary people.

Yet for all the problems, security was often said by local people to be better than other parts of Afghanistan:

Compared to other areas [of Afghanistan] it is better. Here if someone wants to go somewhere there is no anyone to make a problem or take money from him. In some places there are armed men to take money by force or kill. And no one makes problems for the shopkeepers, this is true generally in Badakhshan.

[5] Of the 45 villages surveyed, 16 said security was good, 23 that it had improved from last year, 4 that it was not good, and 2 that it had got worse since the previous year.

This perception is interesting because it is not an accurate reflection of the situation. Certainly security is better than in places actually caught up in fighting (such as Shamali, or at times parts of Hazarajat), but a number of districts of Badakhshan have actually experienced worse security in the last few years than most of Afghanistan. In part the perception is probably due to biased radio coverage, and the fact that bad news travels faster than good, but dis-information has also been used as part of mobilising the war effort.

Freedom of Speech

Despite the official line that:

Here it is allowed for every person to say without problem their ideas, no one will make problems for them,

people did not always feel they had freedom of speech or action. One spoke of how no one was able to talk openly about politics or the Taliban, and that if the authorities got to know of such things, big problems would follow. Another said: *According to the human rights of people, there is no security here.*

And another:

I have written a history of this place up until now; but it is in a secure place, it is dangerous for people to know. And all of my official clothes [from earlier times] are inside a pillow.

Conscription

Most ordinary informants in the areas around the frontline spoke of conscription as a major issue. Although officials claimed that not many people go to the frontlines and that those who did went voluntarily, ordinary people told a different story:

There are no volunteers, all are conscripted. No one goes willingly from Faizabad.

The system of conscription works from the top. Massoud sends for men for the frontline and the instruction ripples down the line of commanders and ends up in villages. If someone has money he

Hermione Youngs

Learning how to knit, Faizabad

can pay his way out, if not the only alternative may be to flee the village. Few go willingly and in some areas there is a refusal to send people to fight.

In the villages you can find few young people, everybody went to Iran. In our village we have about 1000 young people in 300 families - some go with their families but mainly it is the young people who go; and 20 or 30 people they went for fighting, they get about 20 laks. They are chosen by the commander, if they don't go they have to pay money. They go for 15-20 days. Families they wait for their return, they pray. But since last year the village has not sent anyone. People say, 'when Rabbani was here we had to fight but why should we fight now?' They will provide food, but not send people to the front line.

Every village has to send people, maybe five or ten. Many people are escaping to Iran, 15 year old boys, too young to grow beards (Keshem).

In theory, those who go to fight should get paid but often they are not.

They should be paid, but those who come from villages they are paid a little, and the rest the commanders put in their pockets.

Last year from Keshem went a lot of people, not so much this year. Men have not gone willingly but by force. Last time they took my son they didn't pay him anything.

One interviewee (a basic grade NGO worker, not a wealthy man) described the situation:

They take young people, 15 years, 16 years. One [of my sons] escaped and went to Baghlan and the other to Wakhan. And the other, last year they took him by force. They come at night and take them by force. First they send messages, and he will escape and hide. Then finally they come to the house, and they will surround the house and surround him. Most of the young boys have escaped from the village to Pakistan or Iran. Some families have heard from their sons, others not. My son was for two years in Iran and I looked after his wife and child. Sixty or 70 young men have gone from my village of [120 families]. This year is a very bad year, the harvesting is not good and the young have gone, so families are in a very bad situation. Drought is an excuse for the people, it is because of the fighting they go.

And this year I released him from the commanders. To release I did not pay but implored the commander to release my son, and I sent some labourers to work for the commander. My son was in Iran and when he came back, every day the commanders sent a message for him to come and join them, [they said] we will appoint you to be a commander. And he said, 'I have an old father, I want to look after him'. Sometimes to the commander, to keep him quiet, I will send someone to work in the house or on the land; and if they [the commander's men] make problems I will send him [my son] to Iran. All the families in the village are doing this.

For those who have to go to the frontline, mines are a major hazard. They are laid by both sides and young people are often injured by their own side's mines - the people who initially plant the mines know where they are, but the new group of fighters coming in do not. In the clinic in Keshem, a skinny 17 year old who had been fighting for a year had just lost his left leg to a mine. Like others who were injured he was waiting to go by helicopter to Tajikistan for treatment. When he was better, he told us, he would go back. Surprised, we asked whether this was what he wanted: 'No', he said, 'but I will be taken by force'.

The war demands not only fighters but, other support to the war effort. Whilst we were conducting interviews in Keshem in autumn 2000, the governor was announcing that people must assist the war effort, that they had to give cattle, or if they had no cattle to give one lak, and also food and firewood. One interviewee spoke of how:

They came to collect bread and Afs, four, five days ago. We have nothing, how do you think we provided this? It was by force.

SITUATION OF WOMEN

Economic Issues, Education and Social Changes

The situation of women in Badakhshan, whilst by no means good, was generally felt by informants to be better than in other parts of Afghanistan. Whether it has got better or worse over the last couple of decades is more difficult to answer.

For rural women there has been little change:

There has been no change in women's lives. Here it is a very local life, here are no education facilities

Hermione Youngs

For rural women, life has changed little

for women. And they have very independent lives, with husbands and brothers they do harvesting, everything. They are the heads of the families and they have the right to go to the houses of relatives, there is no limitation. Inside the village they go alone, if the destination is far then 2, 3, 4 women can go together, or if she is alone her husband will take her. (Ragh, male interviewee)

A recent NAC report described a typical rural woman's day:

The women normally rise at sunrise, pray and then go out into the orchards to harvest the fallen mulberries. Breakfast for the family is prepared. If any nan remains from the evening supper it is given to the children, if not they have tea and mulberries. After breakfast the women go out into the fields to collect grasses, graze the animals, collect fuel and carry out their agricultural work. The women return home at noon to prepare lunch – again normally salt tea and mulberries. During the afternoon, house duties are undertaken. Cleaning, washing, sewing, weaving etc. Supper is prepared in the late afternoon and eaten before sunset. Most families cannot afford kerosene for lanterns and go to bed as soon as it is dark.

For urban women, however, the years of war have undoubtedly destroyed a number of gains that they had made by the late 70s, the time one woman called, 'the golden age for women'.

Then there were all kinds of opportunities for girls, for women to work. Women worked in offices, took part in elections, in general meetings, gave speeches in public gatherings. We had freedoms, we had rights in those times. Then came the revolution, day by day instead of growth of Afghan culture and heritage there was an alien culture imposed. Key people were killed, sought refuge abroad. So it was shattered, materially and spiritually. Currently we

are in a position where we have no control; so many hands, so many manipulations, and no one cares. We are women of the world, yet every year children cannot make it to school, they lose the chance to become even literate. And today the great majority of the Afghan population, they have no future.

Urban educated women were proud of their heritage, the fact that women worked at all levels and could even be elected to Parliament. They were aware of loss:

There are lots of educated women in Badakhshan, doctors, teachers… there were lots graduating from the pedagogical institute, there was even a woman sheriff. But when the mujahedeen captured Kabul this stopped, and now we are jobless.

Unlike when the Taliban took Kabul, here it wasn't a sudden change but rather a gradual deterioration in opportunity brought about by a worsening economic situation, an overall deterioration in the level of services, and an increasingly conservative environment.

When the mujahedeen first came we were in the office for three or four years, but there was no pay and slowly staff left and got other jobs and the office closed.[6] *Economic problems made people leave, staff got one lak pay a month - nothing. The economic situation of women has got much worse in last ten years. Men are jobless, and some women get jobs in projects but it is difficult for women to support the whole family.*

Before the mujahedeen the girls had a much better life, they could be anything; after the mujahedeen things became very bad, now it is a little better.

The effect of increased conservatism is seen not only in the edicts of commanders but in social pressure from family, friends and neighbours. One female worker wanting to go to Islamabad on her own to attend an agency-run course - and supported by her husband in this - was forced by the wider family to take her brother with her as mahram because of 'what the neighbours might say'.
Urban women were very aware that a take-over of the area by the Taliban would place even more limitations on their lives:

They have very strict rules. Here women are working with men, the Taliban would make a lot of problems for us, we don't want them. But we are not able to move from here, to go where? We would be like in a jail.

But they were also aware that the conservative trend was not limited to Taliban controlled areas. They worry about uneducated children and worry for the future.

The Taliban brought a lot of limitations on women. And when the Islamic government came, at that time they also brought some limitations. Before when Najib was president, the life of women was very good. Now, the life of women has become lower, there are limitations on education, and maybe after this we won't have any women doctors or teachers. At the moment my daughter is in 12th grade and I want for her to extend her education, but where? This is impossible for her.

The increased conservatism, and corresponding loss of freedom for women, was related to the war and to the increased influence of commanders. It varies from place to place, and from time to time, depending on the attitudes of those with influence. For example, it was observed that when Rabbani was in Faizabad, women felt a greater degree of freedom, were more to be seen on the streets.

In Keshem, by contrast, there was preaching in the mosques that women must not go to the bazaar and must not be seen outside the house. Keshem is close to the frontline and in general women are seen less on the streets at times of insecurity, both because of their own fears for their safety and because of the dictats of men.

In Argu the situation of women was said to be, by Badakhshan standards, quite good:

Women can move around and you get women teachers, nurses, doctors. They [the authorities] brought teachers and their families and set them up so they could teach. During the Jihad time a decision was made to encourage women's activities, and families with educated women moved from Faizabad and Shegnan.

[6] Other informants suggested that it was also that the mujahedeen took the top jobs for themselves.

In Baharak, however, women cannot even be seen to go to the bazaar, whilst in Shegnan both men and women appear to be much more equal. Women there join in discussions, can be seen by men they are not related to and can talk with them with little problem. However, major decisions are still made by men and "women do as they are told". Nevertheless, the open approach for education and active encouragement of female teachers to move to other areas is radical for Afghanistan.

In Faizabad women spoke of how:

Here the 'weapon-men' they make the women wear the burqa. I feel terrible about it. Before, educated women never wore the burqa; then the mujahedeen captured the town, announced that everyone had to wear it, and everyone did.

And:

Ever since I was a girl I had not worn the chador until the Islamic revolution, then this change took place. And when we talked to the authorities they said, 'a lot of our soldiers were raised in rural areas and when they see a woman without chador it creates a problem, so for the time being it is better to be covered'. But we don't agree with this justification, because in rural areas there is no chador.

Although the imposition of the burqa is not liked, it is not seen as an essential issue:

The concept of freedom for us is education and the opportunity to go out and develop something; it does not matter if to walk on the streets we have to wear a veil. A chador cannot stop a woman from education or work. It therefore has not been a major problem.

What is far more important to women is that war has brought poverty and that they have suffered greatly from it, their lives reduced to an endless quest to find enough food for their children:

The poor women, they have a very bad life. One person can afford to have only one nan, and for the remaining part of the day there is nothing else to eat. That bread is not enough to feed one child. I have surveyed district 2 [in Faizabad] and I have seen women that have spent days starving, they have no income and no livelihood, and they are very much scared of the bad winter. So far there is no source of help, even the rich people now have become poor, and what can the poor contribute to other poor people? In the past people helped the destitute, now they too have nothing. Parents are panicking for when the school year finishes in December and the food distribution with it.[7] *What will they do for the winter? Poverty has been so general, even the rural people are in a desperate situation. And the villagers come to the city because of the poverty.*

The pattern of the last 21 years has not, however, been all one of loss, sometimes women have been able to wrest gains from the situation. A number of informants spoke of how education for girls was better than before, a fact largely attributable to agency support for female education. Sometimes the very poverty that caused so much suffering had also delivered the right to work, and with it an increased self esteem for women:

Hermione Youngs

Ismali woman. Wakhan

[7] This is a reference to the FFE scheme

But most of families they have economic problems, so husbands make them [the women] go out, to wash clothes, to bake bread.

Men can't say anything. He should be satisfied if I go morning and evening to work; he looks after kids.

It's getting better for women: that's about work, it's because of the economic situation for our families. In the first days it was unacceptable that women went to foreign offices and worked with men, but now they accept it. Though men find it difficult to accept women having jobs and they get too much angry and nervous, but they can't afford to say no.

In the past men were very cruel but now women have more rights, they can say, 'I go out, I support my family, you cannot hit me. Fifty years ago it was just a few women working, 8 years ago it was a lot.

It is worth noting, however, that all these quotes come from Faizabad; and even here the gains are fragile and resented by the commanders:

Two girls were explaining about the food distribution, and the commanders got angry, they said, 'you should be telling about religion'. But the mullahs don't have a problem, it is the commanders.

Women feel that few men will defend them, that the social pressures will prove too strong:

Men, they are happy to go with whatever society wants, or else people will say there is something wrong with that family.

And an AfghanAid report noted how despite the fact that they could clearly see many women working on fields, male respondents told them, 'Men do most of agricultural work, women contribute little'. An example, as they rightly point out, of how easily women's work goes unacknowledged.

In talking to women the sense was always that the overwhelming concern was the economic, the basics of survival, and that other things were secondary. But women did also talk about other things. They said they felt safe to travel but that they should have someone with them, another women or a child. Although travelling for work, for example as teachers or health workers, was different; then, they said, they could go on their own. Indeed the general feeling was why would women want to travel, except to see relatives, unless it was for work?

Sometimes women's comments were contradictory, reflecting the fact that things are different for different people. Women spoke of how they were not formally allowed to participate in men's meetings on community affairs but at home they discussed with men. At the same time others spoke of how they didn't have influence in political life, or often even in households. Generally it was felt that educated women have some influence, non-educated women none.

Women spoke of legal rights and how in practice the situation could vary:

Different families have different ideas, in some families women have their legal rights, in others not. We have the right to meet you, to go to our office, our husbands bring the money to us and we spend it. The son gets one right, the daughter gets a half: it is our culture. When there is a distribution the mawlawee comes and gives half to the daughter, one to the son. It is not usual that a woman divorces a man, but the other way. But if a woman wants a divorce she goes to her father's house and makes her husband divorce her. And when she has a baby breast-feeding, then it stays with her until he or she becomes seven years, then it will go to the father. As we remember it is the same, it is according to Islam, some changes were made by the Soviet government but the people didn't accept them.

Women also talked about culture, but that too was very tied up with work:

Before the war women played a significant role, half the culture, half the economy. But that process is also shattered, because now there is no export, no import. All these arts and crafts have been destroyed.

Leisure was not really a concept:

What do women do for pleasure? Nothing. Poor women have no spare time, from 8 until 4 they wash clothes, then they go home and look after the children. In the past we had films, concerts, TV. In Faizabad we have TV but it is no good. The government stopped the concerts; but in Faizabad it was not common, even before, they came from outside. Since 8 years ago the women singers went to other countries, they were not allowed to sing.

Women also recalled how the youth union organised sports for women but now it no longer exists.

The Affect of the Assistance Effort

For some educated women at least, the assistance effort has brought opportunities for work. But it has not been easy, agencies have experienced problems in trying to get permission for women to work or be involved in agency activities. For example, Merlin[8] noted how 'traditional and newly defined restrictions imposed on women' had limited their involvement with NGOs and had been partly responsible for the high drop out rate in the training of village health workers. Oxfam, working in Shar-i-Buzurg, experienced similar difficulties. However, with patient negotiation and a bit of flexibility and imagination, these problems can usually be overcome. NGOs do, however, feel they have to be careful, they don't have women going to offices very often - although they did say that the situation in 2000 was easier than in the years immediately previous. And women themselves say it is getting easier, with more women working for NGOs. The NGOs and UN were seen as useful by the women mainly because they provided jobs and other forms of income support.

Both NGOs and the UN have given support to women's organisations. AfghanAid support a women's centre in Baharak, though it is unable to do work in the communities and all of the activities have to take place inside the centre. UNOPS have been active in supporting a women's organisation in Faizabad, although the situation there is confused and this organisation would appear to be in competition with another similar group that was set up five years earlier. Both have different political affiliations, though they claim not to be political.

Since 5 years there has been a women's organisation established, it is not a political organisation but a society, but no one has stopped us. Faizabad has 60 parts and in each we have one representative, chosen from a meeting of women. Her role is to sort problems, but the most problem is the economy. Representatives come and say, 'you should take poor women'. They chose because they know better than us.

And we have women's councils in 6 city districts. We invited 100% of all of the women in the districts to take part in the elections and this was how the council was set up. During the meeting we discussed about the objectives of the council and candidates, we gave a biography and activities of these candidates. In district 2 there are 13 mosques and 13 neighbourhoods, and they each sent their representatives to participate –13 representatives. When the representatives were elected they came and had a meeting and 3 persons were elected as Chair, President and Deputy, based on qualifications of women and popularity of women. The first election was in district 2, in spring 1997.

We have been going to villages to form village councils. I personally have travelled to 21 villages and we have established councils, and the village welcomes it. Travelling is no problem in Badakhshan, even they co-operate with us. For example, I wanted to establish a community centre and I just walked in to see the President and he was very helpful and said go ahead.

Overall what comes across through talking with women is the struggle, but also that through it all, for educated women at least, that there are still hopes and dreams.

I am not hopeful for the future. Each day the political situation gets worse. But it can become better if we struggle.

Girls still think to become a doctor, a teacher; if you ask them in class they still say this.

The challenge is to turn some of those dreams into a reality.

8 Badakhshan Province, final report, Nov 1998, Merlin.

Livelihoods and Food Security

Historical Context

Even in the 70s the economic situation in Badakhshan was considered precarious. In 1976 UNDP reported that an emergency situation existed in the province and recommended a wide-ranging development programme. It was not implemented and war only aggravated the poverty. Faizabad city became marginalised, a situation which was reflected in price increases above those found in the rest of the country: nevertheless, people say the standard of living was better in those days.

The province has always been food insecure. Before the war local agricultural production only met 50% of needs, and the situation worsened during the war years. By 1990 it was estimated that local produce was only enough to meet the needs of one third of the population, whilst animal husbandry – second only to agriculture in its importance - lost 40% of production because of the war.[9] Whilst the war undermined rural production, the Soviet withdrawal led to an increase in food prices and loss of earning opportunities in Faizabad town. Any industry was always only small scale - woollen mats, leather products, a carpet industry in some locations, some stone quarrying and the production of reed mats, lapis in Keranomanjan.

The combination of a low agricultural base, limited returns on livestock and lack of other earning opportunities has always meant that many families struggle to survive. In August 2000, NAC surveyed Shegnan and found that the staple diet of the majority of people consisted of shawr chai (salt tea) with mulberries for breakfast, shawr chai with nan/mulberries for lunch, and buquli soup (broad beans dried and the flour made into a spaghetti), for supper. Those who could not afford black tea cut and dried a certain type of grass for use as a beverage. Rice and meat were only eaten on special occasions, such as weddings. Even during Eid the normal "special" food was sweets made with dried, ground mulberries and sweet tea. In remote areas

Hermione Youngs

Local transport

9 In 1990 the UN estimated that out of a total land area of 7403 sq km, the total cultivable land was f450,000 hectares, of which 192,000 was actually cultivated. Only 33,000 hectares of this were under irrigation and due to shortage of water land was cultivated on a rotation basis, with about 40% of land lying temporarily fallow. Pastures were over 122,000 hectares and forests over 96,000

such as this, poor families are not part of the cash economy and meet their basic needs by barter. Those families dependent on the market for part of their food suffer from the fact that Badakhshan has some of the highest wheat prices in the country, a product of geographical and political isolation combined with low levels of local production. At times the poverty is so desperate that one worker recorded how:

Men bring wheat home from away and they mix sand with it to make it go further.

The main source of cereal supply is the bread basket area of Kunduz and Takhar. Cereals are not normally imported from Pakistan or Tajikistan, the first because the cost of donkey transport over from Chitral is so high, the second because Tajikistan itself is a cereal deficit area and has high prices.

The level of poverty is reflected in the number of people in debt and the number dependent on charity. In Darayam, Keshem, Shegnan, Shohadda and Teshkan more than 30% of families were said to be in debt and in Wakhan 61% - though the latter is almost certainly related to the high level of opium use. Argu, Jurm, Shegnan, Shohadda and Wakhan all recorded more than 10% of families dependent on charity. Poor families survive bad years by increased labour migration, credit, charity, and by selling off their few assets, including if desperate, selling or mortgaging their land. Inevitably, in the process they become yet more vulnerable. Often farmers are forced to commit their next harvest in exchange for wheat or cash. Focus reports rates of return to the lender being as high as 500 or 600 per cent per annum on such deals.[10]

Wheat prices fluctuate greatly over the year, not only due to the season but also to the availability of wheat from outside. Access to markets is mainly by donkey, as even along the roads few people have the possibility to use vehicles. For villages off the roads barter is the means of exchange rather than cash, and even along the main roads barter is not uncommon. Villagers along the Wakhan Eshkeshem road, for example, would use travelling traders to exchange their poplar beams for tea and salt.

THE RURAL ECONOMY

Land and Agriculture

Agriculture is mainly subsistence farming, people grow to meet their own needs and have little to sell. The situation has long been like this – in 1990 an SCA report noted that due to food shortages, 99% of all sales were made immediately after the harvest and that on average only 19% of farmers sold wheat, and they only sold on average 12% of their crop. Whilst the majority of farmers in all districts reported wheat deficits, this ranged from 68% of farmers in Keshem, the best-off district, to 100% in Shar-i-Buzurg.

Farms are small[11] and very few families can meet their food needs solely from agriculture. In the interviews done for this study, only in one village (in Keshem, the richest agricultural district) did any families meet their food needs in this way, all others used a variety of strategies. Land patterns vary greatly from district to district. The sample surveys done for this study showed that less than 10% of families in Eshkeshem, Shar-i-Buzurg and Shegnan were landless, whereas in Argu and Keshem more than half the households were landless. Shar-i-Buzurg, Shegnan and Shohadda all had large numbers of small farmers, whereas villages surveyed in Teshkan and Yaftal had less than 10% of households in this category. Whilst relatively few families rent land to or from others sharecropping is common, although its practice varies greatly from district to district.[12] AfghanAid found that in the four villages surveyed in Zebak 76% of households were owners, cultivating 95% of the total area, whilst in Warduj and Argu sharecropping was more common. From the villages visited for this report, district averages varied from 0% to 38% and some villages had as much as 50% of families engaged in sharecropping. Both the landless and small landowners can act as sharecroppers for others, and there are circumstances in which poor farmers are forced into accepting very oppressive contracts.

Over the years, several forces have acted to change land ownership patterns. The first is the inheritance distribution amongst families, where sub-division

10 Stepping out of Poverty, Focus, 1998.

11 This has long been the case, for example, the SCA survey (1990) showed that the most common farm size in 1978 was less than 5 jeribs; and above 15 jeribs it was usually all rainfed land.

12 For example, FAO surveying Faizabad district in 2000, found that the majority of farmers cultivated their own lands and only a few leased to or from others; whilst in 11 of the 15 districts covered for this study none of the villages surveyed had any tenant farmers.

results in a decrease in large landowners and an increase in smaller landholdings as the land passes down through the generations. Acting in the other direction is the increasing impoverishment of small landowners which has caused them to sell or mortgage their land.[13] As there are few opportunities to earn money, even land temporarily mortgaged tends to become a permanent sale. The number of landless is therefore growing. This process has been exacerbated by the drought, which has increased the tendency to sell land and to use the money for the short-term imperative of securing food. If forced to sell, landowners prefer to lose their rainfed lands rather than irrigated ones, both because they are less productive and because strong ownership documents are often not in existence for these lands. Most rainfed lands were former pastures and the right to cultivate them has at times been disputed, with money collected as fines for pasture cultivation. Prior to the war, the forces acting on land-ownership were believed to have largely balanced each other out, so an equilibrium was reached in terms of farm size. In the last twenty years, however, both war and drought have disrupted this equilibrium with a loss to small landowners and an increase in landlessness.

Patterns of cultivation vary between districts and have changed over time. Rainfed farming is predominant throughout the province but some western areas have a mix of rainfed and smaller amounts of irrigated land, whilst the upland areas of eastern Badakhshan have no rainfed land and only small amounts of irrigated land, which can only be single-cropped. Communities here are generally food deficient. The 1990 UNIDATA report claimed that Darwaz[14] had the least cultivable land of all districts and all of it was used for orchards, whereas Baharak, Keshem and Ragh all had more than 80% of their cultivable land given over to seasonal crops. In all areas wheat was the predominant crop, but whereas in Ragh it was 100%, in Keshem 31% of the land was given over to rice cultivation. In Darwaz and Shegnan mulberries were second only to wheat and in Zebak barley was important. It would appear that like other upland

Hermione Youngs

Wakhan after irrigation

[13] The latter refers to the practice of taking a loan against the land; the provider of the money gains the right to use the land on a temporary basis, and if the loan is not repaid within the agreed time becomes the permanent owner of that land.

[14] Focus (1998) also spoke of shortage of land as a major issue in Darwaz.

parts of Afghanistan, there has been an increase in wheat production and a decline in the growing of barley. According to SCA, in 1978 rain fed barley was grown by 79% of farmers, irrigated wheat by 77%, and rainfed wheat by 64%. By 1986 irrigated wheat had become the most important crop, grown by 74% of all farmers, whilst only 26% grew rainfed barley and 28% rainfed wheat. At the same time, however, it appeared that the average area per farmer under irrigated wheat declined, whilst those that did plant rainfed crops were sowing greater areas.

The SCA survey also showed that yields of all crops had declined continuously between 1978 and 1985. After 1985 there was some recovery, particularly for barley. Figures collected for this report suggested that in a normal year yields for irrigated wheat varied from 25:1 in Keshem (the equivalent to 100 sers per jerib)[15] to as little as 4:1 or 5:1 in some parts of Eshkeshem and Wakhan. For rainfed wheat the returns varied from 13 or 14:1 in Keshem to 4:1 in villages in Argu, Teshkan, Shegnan and Darayam. In 2000, the drought reduced irrigated yields to 16:1 or 17: 1 at best (Argu and Keshem) and rainfed yields were often as low as 1:1, or even less (i.e. farmers reaped less than they planted).

All rainfed lands are single cropped. Double cropping of irrigated land is done if water is available and the climate warm enough. Improved varieties are sometimes grown on irrigated land, depending on availability, but rainfed land is sown almost entirely with local varieties.

As well as cereals, farmers grow some fruit and vegetables but these usually occupy very small amounts of land and are mainly for the family's own use. Of the districts surveyed by AfghanAid the number of trees was highest in Warduj, but the amount of land given over to fruit was still small compared to the major fruit growing parts of country. Trees are often planted along ridges so that they don't compete with staple grains. Interviews for this study showed that the only districts where fruit trees were significant as a commercial crop were Ragh (9%) and Keshem (8%). However, in a number of districts there was significant growing of fruit trees for family use: Eshkeshem, Jurm, Keshem and Shar-i-Buzurg all had 35% or more of families growing fruit trees for their own use; and the Shegnan villages visited averaged 82%, a reflection of the importance of mulberries. Black cumin grows as a wild herb on the mountains and fetches a high price in the bazaar. Liquorice also grows wild, although it is no longer collected.

AfghanAid (2000) found that crop rotation was commonly practiced on irrigated as well as rainfed land in Argu and Warduj but mainly on irrigated land in Zebak. Most of the crops cultivated were dual purpose, the grain being used for food and the stalks for animal fodder. Some alfalfa and clover were grown just for animal feeding. Corn is planted after wheat for green feeding if irrigation is available – generally it is planted densely and thinned for feed, leaving the rest to harvest as grain. More than 90% of the corn planted is planted after wheat, only 10% on fallow lands. Mung is also grown after wheat, for food and straw, and is considered excellent for animals. In general, reports indicate that farmers are well aware of the benefits of crop rotation and when they do not practice it this is due to intense pressure on the land.

Agriculture in eastern Badakhshan is almost entirely dependent on irrigation. Other parts of the district have a mix of irrigated and rainfed land but irrigated land is always predominant. Springs are the most common source of irrigation waters, with rivers important in some districts. Lack of irrigation water and rainfall were seen to be the biggest impediments to agriculture followed by lack of inputs, particularly improved seed and fertilizer. The SCA report of 1990 found that 20% of farmers considered lack of good seed to be a major impediment to farming, whilst the use of chemical fertilizer had declined greatly during the war and its lack was considered by 12% of farmers to be a serious problem. Since then, however, the political isolation of Badakhshan has meant that access to fertilizer has declined markedly. What is not clear from the reports is the extent to which fertilizer was only ever an option for richer farmers in more accessible locations. Use of animal dung as fertilizer is limited as most of it is burnt as fuel. Lack of farm power was seen as less of a problem because farmers had taken to sharing oxen to compensate for decline in numbers. The drought, however, has changed this situation as large numbers of oxen have been sold. Tractors are hardly used and are not suitable for small and often isolated farms.

[15] Farmers generally measure yields as the number of sers harvested for 1 ser planted.

Access to inputs depends on location and wealth. AfghanAid found that in Argu farmers seemed to have reasonable access to fertilizer - 40% applied DAP and 76% urea, 24% applied animal manure; whilst in Zebak only 18% applied DAP and urea and 72% animal manure. Chemical fertilizer is mostly applied to improved varieties with few farmers using it on local varieties and the dosages used are low. This access is, however, partly due to the (subsidised) programmes of agencies and figures would be very different if farmers had to rely solely on the market. FAO, surveying Faizabad district in 2000 (unpublished report) found commercial fertilizer or agrochemicals were either not available, expired, or very expensive. Of the 38 farmers interviewed 37 said they had no access to improved fodder seeds and the other one had 'poor' access. Thirty three had no access to agro-chemicals and 34 no access to tractor power, 10 said they did not even have access to oxen and a further 11 described their access to oxen as poor. Twenty six said they had no access to animal manure. The only input that seemed at all reasonable was water, with only two having no access, 20 poor access and 16 fair or medium access. Wells, water pumps, karezes and achats did not exist in the area, though achats could be used as the Kokcha river is close. Numerous plant diseases, weeds and insect pests were reported. Absence of improved seed was cited as the biggest problem, followed by the shortage and high price of both commercial fertilizers and animal manure.

In general, rust and smut are major problems. Locusts, which used to be a major source of damage, are no longer a problem due to a large programme of locust eradication in the early 1990s. Pistachio forests suffered damage from the increased number of porcupine in 2000, although overall the pistachio harvest was excellent.

Livestock

In the UNIDATA report of 1990, animal husbandry was quoted as being second only to agriculture in importance, and in the mountainous districts it was said to be of primary importance. However, by 2000 only in Wakhan and Eshkeshem did animal husbandry make up 30% or more of people's livelihoods, and only in these two districts and Ragh did it count as more important than casual labour. This may, however, have been partly due to the drought. Between 1999 and 2000 sheep prices often fell by 25% and sometimes by as much as 40%.

Dr Eqbal

Boys collecting animal dung - an imporant source of fuel

Prices for cattle fell even more steeply, with a cow often fetching only half - and sometimes less than a third - what it would have done in 1999. In a number of villages people simply said they could not sell their animals because no one wanted to buy. Given that livestock are sold to make up the wheat deficit, what is even more important is the change in terms of trade between livestock and wheat. Whereas in 1999 a sheep would purchase between 7 and 21 sers of wheat, depending on location, in 2000 the maximum was 8 sers (in Brogil in the Wakhan corridor) and in many villages it was as little as 3 sers. By March 2001 this had dropped still further, to only 2 sers in many villages in Ragh district.

In all districts surveyed except Eshkeshem, Shar-i-Buzurg, Shegnan, Yamgan (and Wakhan if one omits the data from the district centre, Khandud), a third or more families had no sheep or goats at all, and in Baharak, Darayam, Jurm, Keshem and Shohadda 60% or more of families had none. Moreover, the families that did have livestock generally only had

a few - owning more than 5 sheep or goats was rare except in Eshkeshem, Keranomanjan, Ragh, Shar-i-Buzurg, Shegnan and Wakhan. Cattle ownership is even lower. In 6 of the 15 districts surveyed more than half the households had no cattle at all, and most of the others had only one or two. However, animals still have a social importance and are a valuable source of fuel and dairy products.[16]

The quality of livestock is generally poor and productivity low; diseases and parasites are common. Animal husbandry is largely reliant on pastures, supplementary feeding is done rarely in late spring and autumn and a little more often in early spring and winter, but high prices limit its possibility for most farmers. Those farmers who have more irrigated land usually put a small part of their land under fodder crops (alfalfa and clover), which makes them more secure. Landowners also use mulberry trees as fodder.

Marketing of fodder crops is very limited, only wheat straw is available on the market and its price varies. It is normally cheapest in August and very expensive in March, April and May. However, the drought meant that in 2000 the cost of wheat straw was always extremely high – 400,000 per 10 sers, as opposed to a previous 20,000. Hay is rarely found in the market but fresh alfalfa can be obtained in Faizabad, though not in the villages. Other fodder crops are produced by farmers for their own use in winter and are not found in the bazaar.

In almost all villages everyone has access to the village grazing grounds but these are often inadequate to meet demand and those who have the money will rent additional grazing. The pastures of Badakhshan are important not only to the livelihoods of the province but to a much wider area. Shewa is the biggest pasture, in northeast Afghanistan and flocks from Kunduz, Takhar and Baghlan, as well as Badakhshan itself, will come there for summer grazing. Over-grazing has caused degradation of many pastures, and this is a particular problem at springtime when the young plants are unable to establish themselves. Since 1992 there has been an increasing tendency to plough parts of Shewa in order to plant wheat, a practice which can only lead to further destruction of a fragile environment.

Poppies

The history of poppy cultivation in Badakhshan stretches back several centuries, with the crop believed to have been introduced by Chinese traders as a medicine. The resultant addiction created a market and led to systematic growing of poppies and the province has the highest level of drug addiction in the country, though production levels are nowhere near as high as areas such as Helmand and Nangahar.[17] The patterns of both production and addiction are patchy and no one quite understands why they have developed in the way they have. Only some areas grow poppy, whilst other areas equally suitable do not, and only some areas have high levels of addiction. The areas that grow are not necessarily the areas that consume, and vice versa. The areas cultivating tend to be Tajik and Sunni (though not exclusively so), those using are usually the Ismaeli communities – although Ismaeli communities in other parts of Afghanistan are not generally opium addicts. The Aga Khan has recently issued a decree that poppy should be neither grown nor consumed and this has led to a reduction in cultivation in Ismaeli areas and some reduction in use.

UNDCP

Poppy head

16 Meat is rarely eaten except on ceremonial occasions.

17 In 2000, opium poppy was grown on 2,458 hectares in Badakhshan compared to 42,853 hectares in Helmand and 19,747 in Nangahar. Only 1 district (Faizabad) had more than 1000ha of poppy, and that only just. Afghanistan, Annual Opium Poppy Survey, 2000, UNDCP.

The opium poppy can be cultivated on both irrigated and non irrigated land, will grow at altitudes of up to 3000m, and does not require much water. As such it is ideally suited to conditions in the province. As well as extracting the resin (used for production of opium and heroin), poppies are used as a source of oil, winter fodder for animals, fuel and even soap. Commercial growing of opium poppies is largely concentrated in Faizabad, Argu, Keshem, Khosh and Jurm, and it is a well-established part of the cropping system. When asked, farmers say that they grow it because it is so much more profitable than wheat and because it requires little water. Not only is it an important source of income in an area where there are few other opportunities, but it is the only crop from which farmers can easily obtain a loan and many are held into patterns of production because they owe money to the drug traders. Focus reported farmers in Jurm and Khosh receiving cash in February at one third of the value of the crop when harvested in July. The cycle of indebtedness thus entered into is hard to escape.

Although people have used opium for many years, it was only after the Saur revolution that mass cultivation started. Several factories are now reported to be producing heroin – one in Keshem and two around Faizabad. In 2000, a number of districts recorded significantly less poppy production than in previous years.[18] In Argu this was said to be because of the drought, whilst informants in Wakhan said it was due to alternative livelihoods being provided through FFW. Whilst the latter is true, the reduction was not entirely voluntary - the NGO involved had the community contract include a clause that poppy would not be grown. As the worker noted, though it was verified that poppy was not grown in these areas in 2000 there is no guarantee that the community will not revert to poppy growing in future years. Reduction in poppy growing may also be because farmers in Badakhshan are finding value of poppy resin decreasing because of tightening Tajik border controls, decrease in quality, distress sales and an over supply onto world markets. Although fresh opium prices were higher in Badakhshan than elsewhere in Afghanistan in 2000, (52USD/kg farm-gate price in Shar-i-Buzurg), they were still lower than previous years.[19] Yields were also reported down because of the drought. In Ismaeli areas, a further factor was probably the Aga Khan's decree that poppy should not be grown.

Most of the drugs cross the river to Tajikistan, the trade being highly organised and very lucrative.

Lapis

The Lapis mines present a potentially significant source of wealth to Badakhshan but are currently controlled by Massoud and his commanders. Production levels are low as primitive technology means mines fill up with stones - of the 60 or so mines, only five were working in 2000. The mine is sectioned off and each section rented out for periods of time. The big commanders used to do the negotiations on behalf of Najmuddin, since his death Sadar is in control. Production is divided into three: one third going to Massoud, one third to Sadar, and one third to the main commander in Keranomanjan. In 2000, the rent on a section of mine was 24,000 laks (N.Afs) for one month. The traders renting the sections will bring men from their own village or family, up to 500 labourers at any one time. Sometimes they are paid 150,000 N. Afs/day (or 50,000 plus food), sometimes they get a percentage of the lapis, sometimes they work the

Hermione Youngs

Lapis boy

[18] UNDCP notes that Jurm had a 38% reduction, whilst NAC and Focus also quote observable reduction in the growing of poppy.
[19] UNDCP 2000.

mines just for extra they can pick up and sell. Most of the profit is said to go straight into the pockets of commanders.

The mines represent a dangerous living for the workers associated with them, usually young men between 20-30 years old. Conditions are reported to be dreadful. The mine has been described as a 'dark hole', with a tunnel which goes up to two kilometres into the mountain and is very dangerous. How many are killed or sustain serious injuries is difficult to determine, but numbers are certainly high.

Outside the lapis mine resembles the old black and white movies of gold towns, all men and no women. The better off men (the commanders and traders) have young boys to look after them and the bazaar is more luxurious than the bazaars of Rawalpindi, full of perfumes and creams. From Keranomanjan the lapis goes to Pakistan, with yet more money going in taxes to the commanders en route. First-quality lapis sold in Afghanistan brings 100-200 laks/kg, medium quality 80-100 laks; and low quality 20-50,000. N.Afs. Poor people move the low-grade lapis to Chitral and exchange it for soap or ghee. In 1995, 10,000 sers of lapis was reported moving over the Shah Saleem Pass on one day; by 2000 it was said to be 15,000 a day in the summer months. However, the quality is reputed not to be what it was in the past. Prices in Pakistan for good grade lapis are 10,000 -50,000 rupees/kg, for lower quality, 200-500 rupees/kg.

There are also supposed to be emeralds in Shegnan but these have not been mined for many years.

Casual Labour and Migration

Casual labour has now become very significant in making up the shortfall in food production, especially for those who have neither land nor animals. In seven of the 15 districts surveyed for this study casual labour made up 20% or more of people's livelihood, and in a further four districts it made up 10% or more. Moreover, this figure would be higher in a normal year as the drought affected labour opportunities both in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. Lack of demand brought down wages and whilst in 1999 a worker had to labour for about a day and a half to earn enough to purchase a ser of wheat, in 2000 it was often nearer three days. The reduction in casual labour was to some extent made up by FFW. In six districts the category 'other' accounted for 20% or more of livelihoods, and in six more 10% or more. Although FFW was not the only thing to be included under 'other', it made up the bulk of this category.

Life is hard enough that people will try almost anything to make ends meet:

Our people are very active people, they can work very properly. People are very clever here, only with the shortage they cannot help themselves. People search gold from the wash. (Ragh)

But usually work involves leaving the village:

In the upper valley most people are very poor. In my village there were 3000 people, but 200 left because they had no job. They have gone to Iran. (interview in Keshem)

In centre no one has animals or land, they go to Takhar to work or do small trade. In the last years maybe 20% of people, whole families, have gone to Kunduz, Takhar and Baghlan in search of work. And 70% of families send one or more family members out for work at harvest time, but during the time there is no work they'll stay here (Ragh).

Some of the work is found locally but mostly it involves travelling outside the province, or even outside the country.

Some go to Pakistan and Iran, some go in harvesting time to Kunduz to work. (Keshem)

But families send someone to Iran, Pakistan, for one or two years. A lot do this, from Baharak hundreds have gone, they send money back and then after one, two, three years they come back. The married come back to see their families, and the single their parents. Those who do not come back are very few. From our village [120 families] more than 100 went to Iran and only one did not come back; he married an Iranian woman.

Whilst in a normal year[20] relatively few whole families move out of Badakhshan, many individuals leave in search of work. The AfghanAid study (2000) showed the percentage of male workers migrating in search of casual labour varied from 10% in Argu

[20] However, by March 2001 the drought had caused a substantial number of families to start moving from the worst affected districts.

Hermione Youngs

Apprentice carpenter, Faizabad

to 23% in Zebak. Figures for this study were higher, from 12% in Shegnan to more than 50% in Shar-i-Buzurg, Jurm and Shohadda, and 70% in Yaftal. Those who actually left the country, as opposed to just moving outside the province, varied from 8% in Argu to 39% in Eshkeshem.[21]

This year one family left. But lots – most - families send people out. This year the number declined because of FFW, it meant there were jobs for people. (Wakhan)

Although it was normal practice in many areas, migration was almost always seen as the means of last resort - if there is another way to meet livelihood needs that does not involve leaving the village then people will take it.

The road will make a difference because if people have jobs here they will never go out for work (Ragh).

Finally, the location of Badakhshan, with borders to China, Pakistan and Tajikistan means it is an obvious conduit for the smuggling trade.

Smuggling, of course it happens, all those who are powerful do (Wakhan).

THE CITY

Faizabad

Faizabad[22] town has a stronger link to the hinterland than exists in many cities and a significant number of families fulfill at least part of their food needs directly through agriculture. However, agriculture is practiced by the richer households only, the most vulnerable households get their food from the market and/or begging. In 1998 WFP calculated the cash needed to meet minimum food needs as being 4.75USD per person per month and any households with income levels below this were considered

21 Ragh data has been discounted as many respondents said that although no one had gone at the time of the survey, people would go later – which indeed proved the case.

22 Information is this section is largely from WFP's VAM report.

'extremely vulnerable'. The cash required to meet minimum food and non-food needs was calculated at eight dollars per person per month and families falling below this threshold were considered 'vulnerable'.

Whilst both the price of cereal and of labour fluctuate according to the season, the people of Faizabad have seen an overall decrease in purchasing power since 1998. Traders told VAM surveyors in Faizabad that normally 30MT enter the city by truck every day, falling to 5MT by donkey when the road closes. This would be equivalent to an 85% ration for 64,000 people, though it is possible that the tonnage is under-reported. What is clear is that due to a combination of its dependence on the market, its remote location, and its position as the last part of Afghanistan outside the control of the Taliban, the town is vulnerable to cereal supply failure.

In their 1998 VAM report on Faizabad, WFP identified six household types:

Very poor displaced households without male workers: 2 – 7% of the population. Landless, not in receipt of remittances, who have moved to Faizabad in last 12 months, mostly living in free housing allocated by the committee of housing. Meet 97-100% of their minimum food needs. Moderately food insecure and vulnerable to further food insecurity.

Very poor households without male workers and no woman in employment: 3-6% of the population. Meet 97-100% of minimum food needs, mainly through gifts and begging, which account for 80% of income. Moderately food insecure and vulnerable to further food insecurity.

Poor households with one male worker: 20-30% of the population. Urban households who lack skilled workers, land or remittances but who do have one man able to work in casual labour, agriculture or poorly paid government sector. Can meet minimum food needs but not also minimum non-food needs. In general earn about 80% of total minimum income needs. Not food insecure but vulnerable to food insecurity.

Poor households with two male workers. 15-30% of the population. Similar to above but with 2 men able to work. Can meet minimum food and non-food needs. Not food insecure and only moderately vulnerable to food insecurity.

Average households: 30-40% of the population. Receive income or food from at least one of the following: land in the province; remittances; skilled labour; working for NGOs/UN. Some members may also work in unskilled work but average income significantly higher than poor groups. Not vulnerable to food insecurity.

Better off households: 5-10% of the population. Own land in province and typically have family members working in Gulf, Europe, or North America and often receive remittances. Involved in commerce or retail trade. Incomes high and income source diversified. Not vulnerable.

WFP assessed that the majority of households in the city were able to meet their minimum food needs and believed that this was largely due to redistribution, reflecting strong social networks. For 'very poor' households, charity represented 60% of total food consumed and assistance from WFP contributed a further 12%. However, some NGO staff believe that WFP has under-estimated the importance of remittances to poor households.

All households in the 'very poor' category received WFP assistance. Very poor households who were IDPs profited less from redistributive mechanisms but probably receive more international assistance. It was noted that if very poor households lost their access to aid they would go into food deficit. Whilst it was believed that it might be possible for households to make up some of this deficit by increasing child labour and female labour this was not clear. Poor households with one male worker would shift expenditure from non-food to food items if they did not get any form of food aid. All groups ranked wheat as the dominant food source, providing 70-85% of total energy requirements. Consumption of oil and rice was low compared to Kabul and provided only about 5% of energy overall. Only the poorest households eat maize and poorer households will eat pulses, which are cheaper than wheat. Meat and nuts are eaten irregularly, except by the poorest households who don't eat them at all. Vegetables and fresh fruit are rarely eaten. Because poor households get their food largely from the market, prices and earning power are crucial to Faizabad's food security. WFP's calculations showed that prior to WFP assistance the poorest groups were meeting 65% of income (food and non-food) needs, poor families with one male worker were meeting 70% and those with two male workers 90%.

Very poor households rely on women and children to earn an income, mostly by begging and mostly, but not entirely, in the form of food. The most important form of cash income for such households

is zakat. Most non-poor families give zakat as a religious duty, the gifts are personal and do not appear to be regulated by the authorities. Women in these households produce handicrafts for sale to shopkeepers but the returns are very low, they also work baking bread, washing clothes and sweeping. Boys aged 11-14 also worked, usually at tea stalls and in collecting firewood and plastic or rubbish for sale. Income was also obtained by selling household goods. Few families reported using credit, though it was not clear whether this was by choice or because facilities were not available.

For poor households with one male labourer, this labour constituted by far the most important source of income/food. During the summer most men in this group would normally leave for neighbouring Takhar and Kunduz to work on the harvest, though a few remain to harvest poppy or to do manual labour in the city. In the winter the men try to find labour in the city but most say they can only find work one day in three. Government servants are also included in the poor household group, as they have seen their purchasing power drastically reduced over the years and most also do casual labour. Children from this group also work in similar ways to the very poor families. Poor households with two male workers work in much the same way but tend to earn significantly more.

For all groups the food coming through the FFE scheme will have had an impact on the household food supply, but particularly for poor families.

PRESSING ISSUES

The Environment

The destruction of the environment is a major concern in Badakhshan, with very direct and serious repercussions for people's lives. Increased farming of pastureland has led to the degradation of land and reduced the ability of the slopes to absorb water, with consequent increases in flooding. In 9 of the 15 districts surveyed for this study all of the villages reported increased flooding over the last two years, though a number noted that there had not been flooding in 2000 because of the drought. Yamgan was the only district where none of the villages surveyed reported an increase in flooding.

The reduction in tree cover has resulted in the search for fuelwood becoming a major undertaking and villagers reported spending an extraordinary amount of time on this activity, frequently with at least one member of the family going out for most of every day for nine months of the year. The problems of

Hermione Youngs

Bare hillsides as a result of environmental degradation

finding fuelwood have meant that dung is now the major source of fuel, thus depriving the land of a valuable fertilizer supply.

In a number of the districts surveyed most of the villages have seen an increase in trees planted over recent years but few other environmental measures have been undertaken – and the trees may have been planted more for economic reasons than environmental ones. Focus similarly note that watershed protection projects, such as terracing, contour bunding, and tree-planting on the upper slopes, are rare. In Keshem, Baharak, Jurm and Argu there are significant environmental programmes but this is because of the work of NAC and AfghanAid. Only in Shegnan does there seem to be an environmental awareness despite little agency involvement. An NAC report (2000) notes:

Shegnan is the only area that I have visited that is "environmentally aware". Children are taught both at home and in school on the importance of the environment. Trees are protected from grazing animals, watersheds are looked after, gardens are kept clean, before a tree is cut down another one is planted. There are no landslide areas, and communities protect their water supplies. The river is eroding the cultivated land along the riverbank, this is mainly due to the protection walls that have been built on the Tajik side of the river without any consideration given to water flow etc.

The environmental changes would appear to be due to both poverty and the breakdown of controls. Khawrin, the environmentalist with NAC, explained:

Since 21 years Afghanistan has lost the owner; there is no owner for the country and for any country having no owner there is loss, devastation. The problem of erosion is always there; snow in the winter and heavy spring showers. We estimate we have lost more than 85% of our forests, everything was cut.

The area as a whole is very fragile mountain. There are two types of vegetation: pistachio zone (lower) and juniper zone (upper). Previously 2000 tonnes of pistachio kernel used to be exported, now we cannot export even 50 sers! Pistachios are good for the economy, but they also good for the land – and protection of the forests means the protection of life. After the coup everything was lost, there used to be a system for protecting the forests, now it has gone. These were status jobs.

The laws protecting rangeland used to be very strong, much stronger than forest laws, but now people try to farm the best pastureland. They destroy it. Last year animals stayed for 5 months, this year hardly two or three. There is no carrying capacity, they came late, and left early. The rangeland is destroyed, animals destroyed. The government used to look after animals, vets came to summer pastures and stayed there. If rangeland decreases, animals decrease and the poor suffer.

Now some people are replacing the trees, but there is a lot of wrong thinking, they think if they put in more trees it will mean more wood, there is a lack of understanding that trees need space.

People won't do things for the community, they are too poor. All the rivers are eating their banks, the natural vegetation is cut. People are not doing anything about it. Those who have land, they try if they can afford. People know things, but they cannot do, they are too poor. We need to spend money to do things. But a problem is that people have become dependent on agencies

There is some understanding in the area, commanders sometimes understand the need to protect the forest. But what can a poor man do? He has no other way of getting fuel, he has no option. Sometimes kids go out with cans to collect the dung the animals left behind.

The Impact of the Drought

In 2000, what is generally recognised as being the worst drought in living memory swept through Afghanistan. Although Badakhshan was less affected than some areas of Afghanistan, any reduction in crop is serious in such a chronically food insecure area, although just how serious did not become apparent until spring 2001.

The biggest threat to food security in the province was always seen to be a decrease in terms of exchange between labour and wheat. Reliance on rainfed production and on the casual labour markets in north Afghanistan were key factors in causing vulnerability. In 2000 everything went wrong. The price of wheat went up and the availability of casual labour went down. The price of livestock also tumbled, further undermining livelihoods. At the same time as this was happening in Badakhshan, yields in Takhar were severely affected by both drought and conflict. As the Takhar surplus is normally a key source of wheat for Badakhshan,

this badly affected food supply there. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that the labour opportunities in Takhar, normally a major source of seasonal labour for the people of Badakhshan, largely disappeared. Both poppy yields and farm-gate prices for opium were also down, which further undermined livelihoods in some areas. The food security situation was made worse by the fact that, unlike most of country, there was no cheap Kazak wheat in the bazaars in the northeast and as a result the area saw the highest wheat prices in the country – 100,000 N.Afs/kg by spring 2001. This was particularly significant in urban areas, where poor households are very dependent on the market.

However, the drought did not hit all areas equally, some irrigated areas had excellent harvests and the pistachio harvest was one of the best ever. Rainfed wheat suffered the most severe crop losses and in some areas, e.g. Shar-i-Buzurg, farmers decided not even to plant spring wheat because of the shortage of moisture in the soil. They proved to be wise; in many places the spring rainfed wheat was a total failure and farmers did not even reap what they had sown. Autumn planted rainfed fared only slightly better (1:1 for most areas) and most communities dependent on rainfed crops were only able to produce enough to cover 2-3 months food supply.

The situation with irrigated wheat was variable, with yields of up to 25:1, although most areas yielded much less. Smut infestation was also high, up to 60% in some areas, and it was believed that none of the wheat harvested would be of seed quality. Sharecroppers were particularly badly affected by the poor yields and most got less than they sowed. Fodder shortages sent the price of livestock spiralling downwards as people sold their animals in far greater numbers than normal - fodder production was so much reduced that few farmers expected to have more than 3 months supply, compared to 9 months in 1999/2000.

Because of the drought people are selling animals, but no one wants to buy. In a normal year people with 20 animals would sell all the babies and 2 or 3 big ones, this year situation is worse and they have sold most of them. The price this year is 700,000 to one million afs, last year it was 1.5m to 2m (Ragh)

Drought not only affected agriculture but also severely affected grazing. Low and moderate elevation pastures grew poorly due to lack of rain, dried out early, and were heavily over-grazed. High level pastures showed much lower growth rates than normal, only 50-60% of 1999 levels. Because

Hermione Youngs

Food for work programme Kesham

the lowland pasture had suffered so badly, seasonal movements of Kuchis from Takhar and Kunduz to their summer pastures in Badakhshan started between two to four weeks earlier than usual. They also moved with 70-80% more animals than normal, animals entrusted to them by non-Kuchis who do not usually send animals to summer pastures but did so in response to lowland pasture shortage. Livestock health was reportedly poor with high levels of disease. Most worrying was that foot and mouth and anthrax were reported in Shewa, where there are high concentrations of livestock over the summer followed by dispersion in autumn. The pressure on resources caused by the drought exacerbated tensions between the local population and Kuchis, and between different Kuchi groups. In some areas, e.g. Shar-i-Buzurg, local authorities allowed migrating Kuchis to pass but prevented them from using pasture in order to conserve it for local use. In parallel with their early migration, Kuchis returned to the lowland areas earlier than usual because the upland pastures became depleted.

People's strategies to cope with the food shortfall included eating mulberries (to the extent that in many areas none were dried this year);[23] liquidating assets; sending their children to work for rich families; mortgaging or selling land; and taking loans. Farmers who earlier in the year took cash advances against wheat they then did not produce were in a particularly difficult position.

The various assistance programmes made a significant contribution to offsetting the decline in the local and regional labour markets; in a number of villages people said they had not had to send people out to Pakistan because of the amount of work available under the FFW schemes. However, this was probably also due to a pull factor: most people had heard reports of the lack of wage labour opportunities elsewhere, so there was little incentive to go in search of that which was probably not obtainable. By spring 2001, it had become clear that the food aid had not been sufficient to prevent malnutrition and out-migration from the worst affected districts, especially Ragh and Shar-i-Buzurg. In 28 villages in Ragh surveyed by a joint agency mission, 400 people had died in the three months since Ramazan, mainly from a combination of hunger, ARI and measles. Many people were said to be surviving on wild foods.[24] Villagers reported livestock loss of between 80 and 90%. The district commander estimated that about 15% of households had already left and in some of the villages visited it was around 50%. More said they would leave if assistance did not come, and there seemed no reason to disbelieve this.

There are also long-term problems. Not only have many families lost all or most of their assets and incurred new debts, but Badakhshan is also suffering from severe seed shortage. At the time of autumn planting in rainfed areas many farmers did not have enough seed, and therefore either did not plant or were only able to plant with poor quality seed. A credit problem has developed with farmers unable to repay past loans or obtain new loans for either consumption or seed.

Seed is little, they have not enough, only 2-3% of farmers have enough – but not improved seed, here it is impossible to find that. If there is no help from outside, some will sell animals to get from neighbouring provinces, and some will not have (Ragh).

It is clear that the consequences of the drought will require a major re-think of agency strategy if there is not to be yet more displacement.

23 Although it should also be noted that thequality this year was not good for drying.

24 Although wild foods are often eaten as a supplement to diet, this was clearly spoken of as much worse than usual.

Education and Health

EDUCATION

Importance and Access

Education is highly valued in Badakhshan, particularly amongst the Ismaeli communities, and children will often walk many hours to get to school. The lack of education was often mentioned as one of the biggest problems facing people:

All education facilities are closed down; one thing that would help would be education (Wakhan).

People have a lot of interest in education and if we had facilities there would be no illiterate people. Some go out to study, to Faizabad, Kabul, Pakistan, even Egypt, and some come back. Maybe around 700, 800 people in all of Ragh have secondary education; around 60 have tertiary, but only 20 are here, the rest are in Faizabad, mostly they are teachers.

Sometimes there is an almost reverential belief that it can deliver everything:

We know that when the level of education goes up this will solve the problem of Afghanistan. And we see the future of Afghanistan very dark because the education is very poor at the moment. If the level of education goes up, immediately educated people will stop the war. If you think that a man who at the moment is 28, 29 years old, and he doesn't know the rules he just knows that if you want to be a member of the government you must have a gun. I think that if we don't improve the level of education this war will go on for ever. (Eshkeshem)

Education was seen as bringing positive things into an area:

There have been educated people who have returned here because no work was to be found outside, and this has been positive for the village. Education is a positive force, it has improved women's rights – educated men think differently of their women. (Yamgan)

When there is no formal education, people use non-formal provision:

During 4 or 5 months of winter they go to mosque, study the Koran, then to summer school. (Ragh)

Yet despite the positive attitudes to education, levels of provision and of literacy are appallingly low. In Keshem, informants estimated that maybe 4% of women and 9% of men are literate. In Ragh informants spoke of how:

Maybe 2-5% of women can write. Men,10%. Four percent of these are from school, the rest from the mosque or home.

In fact, although their estimate for men was not so far out, figures collected for this study suggested that for women the literacy rates were actually less than 2%. With the striking exception of Shegnan the pattern was much the same in all districts, ranging from 0% in 7 of the 15 districts surveyed for this study, to 5% in Eshkeshem. Men's rates were a little better, ranging from 1.5% in Baharak up to around 30% in a number of districts. Again, Shegnan was an exception, with rates of about 90% literacy for men; although the true district average is probably lower than this as remote villages far from the Tajik border have much lower literacy rates.

AfghanAid data[25] for twelve villages in three districts showed that only 28% of children of school age were actually going to school. The data was not dis-aggregated by sex but it is fair to assume that given the distances of the schools from the villages, a rather small proportion of these will be girls.[26] Literacy rates were strikingly low in all three districts. Zebak, with a very active school, was the best at 10% and Warduj the worst at only 4%. Again the data was not dis-aggregated, but given the lack of access of girls to schools it is clear that girls will make up a very small percentage of this indeed.

Like so many other things, education is the victim of war. In Keshem, the area closest to the frontline, one of the schools was taken over for IDPs and another as a barracks. Staff worried about bombardment and about having a school full of soldiers and weapons. They had no idea what would happen about the end of year exams, which were due. They felt powerless:

We don't know, what can we do?

At other times it was poverty that limited access. Focus reported village schools where many children

[25] AfghanAid, September 2000.

[26] It is rare for girls to be able to travel outside the village to attend school.

could not attend because they did not have shoes to wear for the long walk, whilst in Faizabad teachers said that the inability to afford a chador stopped many older girls going to school.

But although the education situation is bad, this is not a new thing. Data in the 1992 UNIDATA report is limited to eight districts, and even then it is not complete, but it is enough to show that the education situation a decade ago was poor. And bad as it is, the education situation does seem to have improved in the last three years, with increasing agency support, especially for girls.

In Keshem people noted how:

For almost 14 years all the education for girls was stopped here. Now it has re-started again and more than 1000 women and girls are going to school in upper valley. And in villages, before there was no education for girls and now there's some. (Keshem)

The increased interest seems to be due to a combination of teacher training, supply of materials, and interest stimulated by WFP's FFE programme. Materials and teacher training have gone to all districts but FFE is a pilot scheme, which started in 2000 and only operates in five districts and a total of 50 schools. Whilst there is little doubt that people appreciate FFE in those areas where it operates, it also creates problems in adjacent districts which do not receive FFE and do not understand why. Here it can actually act as a disincentive to attendance as people feel the situation unjust. People interviewed in Keshem (a non-FFE district) spoke of how pupils had enrolled in school in anticipation of getting FFE and then dropped out later, when they found it would not be forthcoming. Moreover, its actual affect on education is far from clear. NAC figures indicate that though it made a great difference to initial enrolment rates, it has made no difference to attendance rates, nor to exam pass rates. It does, however, appear to have stopped girls dropping out of school to get married, something that can happen as early as age 13. In interviews it was often mentioned that FFE was important because it was a way to pay teacher's salaries; but it seems an expensive and not very durable way of tackling the salary problem. Teachers' salaries are, however, a major issue. SCA are the only organisation to have a long term commitment to tackling this, but they only support 45 schools out of a total of 243 and the incentive is not enough to feed a family for a month.

School Attendance

In 2000 NAC collected comprehensive data on education for UNICEF, but the patterns are difficult to interpret as FFE has swollen grade 1 enrolments and there are no reliable records from previous years. Also the data relates to enrolment rates not to attendance, and these can be significantly different. What the data does do is highlight questions: why, for example, are drop out rates significantly different in different districts? There would be benefit in doing some more detailed research to try and understand more of the factors that affect school attendance.

In a number of districts, and not just FFE ones, the number of pupils in grade 1 is significantly higher than in grade 2 – sometimes as much as double. However, this is thought to be due not to drop out but to the fact that FFE and provision of education materials and teacher training led to higher enrolment rates in 2000 than in previous years.[27]

In all districts except Faizabad there are more boys than girls enrolled in grade 1, but the proportions can vary from being quite close to almost no girls at all. For example, in Baharak and Jurm girls' enrolments are about 80% that of boys, whilst Ragh has 671 boys and only 36 girls enrolled into grade 1, and Darayam no girls at all. Drop-out patterns also vary. Some districts see girls dropping out at a faster rate than boys, but not all. In Yamgan, the girls' enrolment rate in grade 1 is a little over three quarters that of boys but by grade 5 they have drawn level and in grade 6 there are 146 girls and only 59 boys. There tends to be a drop out of girls around puberty, sometimes because girls are kept at home to prepare for marriage, sometimes just because families cannot afford a burqa. If they get past this, then girls seem more likely to complete to grade 12 than boys. This may be because the economic opportunity-cost of keeping boys in school is greater than for girls. It may also be that some boys leave the area to continue their education in places like Peshawar, as standards are so poor in the higher grades. The opportunity to leave home to continue schooling is rarely available to their sisters, though in Argu there is a boarding school for girls.

[27] For example, Darwaz and Shegnan saw a big input of school materials in 2000, which led to an influx of grade 1 students and raised expectations of more help to follow.

Of all the districts, Shegnan stands out. Education has been a major priority for the people here for many years and there is a general expectation that children will attend school.[28] Because of the extremely high literacy rate in Shegnan, for women as well as men, the district provides teachers for other parts of the province. For example, Argu brought teachers from Shegnan and they were supported by the community, being given accommodation, food, 50 sers of wheat and 50lak. This high literacy rate has nothing to do with the assistance effort, as until 2000 (when UNICEF and NAC sent in large amounts of materials and provided training opportunities), there had been very little agency work in this remote district.

Higher Education

Lack of opportunity beyond grade 12 is seen as a serious problem, and one which has become worse over the years. In part this is due to aid agency policy; for whilst a number of agencies will support primary schooling and a few secondary, almost none support tertiary. Tertiary education has also been hit by the closing down of opportunities beyond Badakhshan, particularly, but not only, for girls.

People in Shegnan spoke of how in the past graduates from Grade 12 used to go to Kabul to gain further education, but since the arrival of the Taliban the authorities have closed the universities and colleges. In 1996 the education authorities decided to open their own teacher training college in the centre of Shegnan. Today there are 57 female and 182 male students attending the College. Twenty one teachers teach a curriculum which includes english, chemistry, biology, physics, geography, religious studies, history and literature. Four of the teachers have Master's degrees from Kabul University, two from Moscow, and the rest have graduated from grade 14. Students attend the College for two years and on graduation move into teaching positions throughout Badakhshan. To date there have been three graduations and 96 female and 136 male teachers are now teaching in the districts of Darwaz, Baharak, Argu and Ragh, as well as various villages in Shegnan. Both the female and male teachers are willing to move out of Shegnan to teach in other districts. As with the teacher training college in Faizabad, the college receives no support, has no facilities, and relies on the personal inputs of the teachers. Students support themselves through their families, and some students cannot attend because their families are too poor to support them. There have also been requests from Eshkeshem and Darwaz for training as there are no facilities there.

Geir Rodven

Taking education materials by donkey convoy

Faizabad has a Faculty of Medicine, which opened two years ago after the Taliban took Mazar and which receives direct funding from Professor Rabbani. It has 284 students but the standard is poor. None of the infrastructure or teaching staff were transferred from Mazar and the faculty is not supported by any agency. In the words of one interviewee:

Pupils in the present Faculty of Medicine cannot write their own names, how can they become doctors?'

There is also a teacher training college for women but it is barely functioning – there are not enough

[28] According to Focus the head of education for the district claimed 55% of all children went to school.

textbooks or stationery and teachers have no salary. There are 77 female students taught by 15 teachers (2 male, 13 female). There is also a director and a head teacher. Unlike the teacher training college in Shegnan, once the students have graduated they do not move out of the Faizabad city area. Presently there is a surplus of poorly qualified female teachers in Faizabad. This problem can only be addressed by a big input of both practical and financial support into the college. There is no teacher training facility for male students in Faizabad.

Quality

Issues of quality concern people as much as access. This is not just in relation to the quality of teachers and teaching materials but also in the crucial role of education as a purveyor of values:

There are some schools running at the moment, but there are no good teachers to teach the students properly, to inform about the war, the disadvantage of fighting. (Eshkeshem)

A key issue is lack of salaries for teachers. There is almost no government support for schools; indeed, when asked whether there was any government support for education in his district, one respondent replied:

Budgets from the government? No, never! They wait for FFE.

In a few cases the district authorities pay minimal salaries, but these are nowhere near enough to live on. Communities support some teachers (often in kind, with accommodation and food) but teachers often teach without pay. As noted earlier, the only NGO to have a long-term commitment to supporting teachers' salaries has been SCA, but this is to a relatively small number of schools.

Another issue is training. NAC train educational staff from the districts, in the districts. Last year approximately 400 teachers attended their sessions, including teachers from Shegnan who walked for three days to attend a three week course held in Eshkeshem. SCA train up to 6th grade for the schools they support, including a 15-day training for women teachers, but all the training is in Taloqan and there is no support beyond grade six.

Women and Girls' Education

In all of our interviews, local men defended the right of females to education:

We are not against girls' education here, if there are facilities we will help our girls and women. There's no education for women here, but some families from Ragh are in Faizabad and they are educated and could come. Here are some women who can read or write, but they learnt at mosque or at home, not school. (Ragh)

How far they really believed this is impossible to judge, certainly for many women there were many obstacles. As one women put it:

But some women they cannot, maybe their husbands do not let them get educated, (Faizabad).

Some of the commanders were said to be unhappy with females going to school, although we were told that most ordinary people accepted it. But even where social attitudes are not against it, for rural women lack of access to schools substantially limits this theoretical right. Girls don't travel, don't walk beyond the village, and this makes an enormous difference to what they can actually access.[29] AfghanAid looking at four villages in each of Argu, Warduj and Zebak, showed that although only two villages actually had schools in the village itself (both in Warduj), three villages out of four in both Argu and Warduj had boys schools within an hour's walking distance of the village. The remaining village in both districts had a school 1.5 hours away. This meant that all boys could access schooling.[30] (In Zebak, boys would have had to walk much further, up to four hours in one case.) For girls, however, the story was very different. None of the villages surveyed in Argu and Warduj had a girls' school within less than an hour's walk. This effectively put education out of the reach of girls in those villages. Five out of eight villages recorded no school for girls with four hours. Khulkhan, in Zebak, was the only village to have a (primary) school within reasonable walking distance - 20 minutes.

For rural girls access has always been a problem, but urban girls felt the narrowing down of opportunity over recent years, as unlike their rural sisters they once had possibilities.[31] Despite this, some of them manage to hold on to their aspirations:

[29] Hazarajat data showed average distance girls would walk to school was 10 minutes.
[30] At least in terms of distance, obviously other factors, such as poverty, could also limit attendence.
[31] Though again, access for the poor was always limited.

In the past the girls had volleyball and basketball in schools, but now there are no teams. Before the mujahedeen the girls had a much better life, they could be anything. After the mujahedeen things became very bad, now they are a little better. Girls still think to become a doctor, a teacher; if you ask them in class they still say this. (Head teacher, Faizabad)

HEALTH

Facilities and Service Utilisation

Health services in Badakhshan are extremely limited. Of the 44 villages surveyed for this report, only 11 had a clinic within an hour by donkey. For 13 villages the nearest clinic lay between one hour and five hours by donkey, for another 10 it lay up to 10 hours away, and for 6 it was two days. At the furthest extreme, for Khandud it was three days by donkey to Eshkeshem, whilst for Sarhad-i-Brogil it was three days to Chitral or Gilgit, the last of which was by road and was affordable only by the rich. In two villages people simply said there was nowhere to go. Poor services are not new. Although the amount of information provided in the UNIDATA 1992 report (four districts only) is too small to enable direct comparisons, it clearly shows that service coverage was not good. The number of clinics was small and most clinics in rural areas didn't have trained doctors and were poorly equipped. There were no special facilities for treating women but female patients were always at least equal in number to male ones, and in Jurm significantly more. There were at that time no arrangements for vaccination at any of the clinics.

The only hospital in the province is in Faizabad. MSF recently took over support of this hospital and have had a major programme of improving and extending facilities, of training staff and of upgrading in-patient care. The hospital has 80 beds, with wards for infectious diseases, medicine, surgery and paediatrics, obstetrics and gynaecology and an operation theatre. There is a general OPD, a malaria and leishmaniasis clinic, a TB clinic and an MCH clinic. There is a general laboratory, able to do basic tests, a blood bank, X-ray, ECG and a small physiotherapy centre. The hospital has the capacity to be ready for any cholera outbreak.

In 2000, admissions to the hospital increased and 5,550 patients were treated. Bed occupancy averaged 90% but some wards still suffered from overcrowding and the pediatric ward frequently accepted two children in one bed. The average duration of stay for a patient was between 3 and 4 days. Patients often presented in the late stages of disease because of difficulties with transport.

Currently there are 19 MoPH clinics in the province, 3 of them are supported by MSF, 11 clinics are supported by SCA[32] and the remaining obtain some supplies through WHO. There are also a number of private clinics. In addition there are five clinic buildings that have been built by UNOPS but that are not operational.[33] UNICEF supports a fixed vaccination centre and regional cold chain in Faizabad. Within the province there are 11 fixed EPI centres, some of which only started in 2000. There are outreach programmes operating from some of these fixed centres. According to the Director of MoPH[34], they are hoping to start another eight centres before the end of 2001 but as yet none of these have happened.

The MSF-supported clinic in Baharak has 18 inpatient beds, a delivery room, laboratory and pharmacy. They run male and female OPD and have an emphasis on MCH, they also run a nutritional programme and a TB clinic. Last year the two male and two female doctors attended between 60 and 100 consultations per day depending on the season. In OPD, 22,950 persons were treated of which 4,920 were children under 5 years (21.5%). Five hundred and nine persons were hospitalised. MSF note that the ratio of female patients was high throughout the year, an indicator that access to medical care for women and girls is well accepted.

The clinic in Eshkeshem, also MSF supported, has general OPD and an observation room. They report that the number of consultations increased progressively during the year 2000, from 660 consultations in January up to 1600 consultations in December. From 40% to 50% of patients are female; the increase in consultation for females being mainly due to the presence of a female doctor since November 2000.

[32] MSF pay incentives in these clinics but MoPH pay the salaries, whereas in SCA-supported clinics the salaries are paid by SCA.
[33] Two in Keshem, two in Argu and one in Yaftal.
[34] Interview October 2000.

Of the SCA supported clinics three are C1, with doctor and laboratory, and six are C2, staffed by mid level health workers. Medair reports that staff in the SCA supported clinics which they visited were supplied with medicines once a year, which they divided up into 12 portions. Medicine usually lasted about 15 days, after which they would give private prescriptions until the following month. The doctor in Shegnan also reported that the clinic there had an insufficient supply of medicines. Support visits to SCA-supported clinics seemed somewhat variable, the clinic in Ragh was meant to have visits every three months but at the time of the Medair visit the last SCA visit had been six months earlier. The clinic saw 40-60 patients a day, mostly men and children. Women presented very late in illness. Seriously ill patients are referred to Faizabad. AfghanAid reported three of the medical centres covered in their survey had no trained medical personnel.

With at best one clinic per district, many people simply cannot reach the facilities. For example, according to the doctor in charge in Shegnan, only 50% of the district's population have access to the clinic. Even where people can reach facilities, service usage is low – ACF found Faizabad to have one of the lowest utilisation rates of all the cities they surveyed in 2000.[35] The proportion of mothers who delivered their last child at home was very high and the rate of post natal visits lower than Kabul or Herat, though similar to Kandahar, where there are also very few health services.

Charging policies are variable. Consultations at Faizabad hospital are free but a small charge is made for services, such as X-rays or blood tests. If patients can afford it they are asked to pay 10,000 N.Afs per night, which is distributed as duty allowance for the night staff. In Eshkeshem, Baharak and Zebok, the price of a consultation was fixed at 10,000 N.Afs, drugs were free of charge. The money collected on a monthly basis is used towards paying the staff incentives, and in Baharak also for taxis for referring patients to Faizabad. Most rural clinics charge 5000 N.Afs for a consultation. SCA-supported clinics charge 2000 N.Afs, plus 40% of the cost of drugs. In rural areas, families will quite often pay for medical advice and drugs with food rather than cash.

Despite the fact that these costs are not high, in many remote rural areas poor people simply do not have money, as they use barter rather than cash to obtain their basic needs. As a result many people say they cannot afford to go to the clinic and herbal remedies are used by all families to treat such things as coughs, colds, gastritis and rheumatism. These herbs are gathered from the hills and fields and distilled at home. Knowledge of herbal remedies seems common.

Health Problems

The paucity of health information for Badakhshan makes it difficult to comment with any degree of certainty on the health situation of the population. Nevertheless, there seems to be a general agreement that key health problems are malaria, TB, respiratory infections, diarrhoea, measles and whooping cough[36] Chronic malnutrition was widely acknowledged as a problem, as were problems associated with childbirth. Infant and maternal mortality is commonly thought to be high and all the anecdotal evidence supports this, although there is, as always, an absence of statistics.

Several districts experienced outbreaks of measles in 2000, resulting in deaths. Of the measles cases or post-measles complications presenting at Baharak clinic, 62% were children under five. The AfghanAid survey of Zebak, Warduj and Argu districts reported measles and whooping cough as major causes of death, but also noted that people themselves often do not know the cause of death. In about 50% of cases of child deaths the respondents were unable to name the cause of death.[37] There was also an outbreak of a virulent strain of influenza in Darwaz that led to a number of deaths at the beginning of 2000.[38] In March 2001 the district of Ragh saw many children and elderly people dying because of a combination of measles, ARI and lack of food due to the conditions brought on by the drought. An joint agency assessment mission in late March 2001[39] found that in one village of 100 households

35 ACF, Faizabad 2000

36 See for example MSF, Medair and AfghanAid reports.

37 In about 50% of cases of child dealts the respondents were unable to name the cause of death and in the first year of life the unspecified catagory 'childhood diseases' took another 15%, leaving th erest victims of whooping cough (14%) or measles (7%).

38 In response, WHO and SCA went in by helicopter and MSF and Medair from Tajikistan.

39 MAC Mission report, 29/03/01.

60 people, mostly children, had died since Ramazan (three months earlier) and in a number of other villages around one third of families had lost someone over that time period.

MSF hospital data shows a seasonal pattern for a number of diseases. Numbers of malaria cases were very high between August and October (though MSF question the reliability of the laboratory services). For diarrhoea the high was in July, and for ARI it was over winter. Of the diarrhoea cases, 70% were children and between 25% to 40% of the cases were bloody diarrhoea. Respiratory infections mostly affected children under 5 years (from 40% to 50% of cases) and increased greatly in winter - from 10% hospital cases in summer, up to 40% in winter. If a child arrives too late to the hospital, pneumonia and bronchitis cases can be fatal.

Health care for ante natal and post natal women is extremely limited. It is common for women to have frequent pregnancies and to suffer from poor nutrition. Many women die in childbirth - although reliable figures are limited, the overall picture told by agencies is consistent. In Shegnan, NAC report that the infant mortality rate was very high - according to the women there at least 50% of children die before they reach the age of 3 years, and people spoke of having 13 children and keeping only four.[40] Focus reports that in the villages where they did interviews, families had lost on average 2 to 3 children in early childhood, compared with 4 to 6 who survived.[41] Out of 20 households interviewed in Eshkeshem, Wakhan and Zebak, with a total of 148 children, 39% of the children had died, plus 4 mothers. In Baharak MSF statistics showed between 30% to 50% of pregnant women are at risk, either because of former complicated deliveries or having had more than six deliveries. Although they ask such women to come to the clinic for delivery, the tradition of women delivering at home is strong and women rarely come to the clinic until after a complication has occurred. MSF noted that 70% of women coming to the Baharak clinic had a goiter and about 15% had anaemia.

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Girls at School

[40] NAC 2000.
[41] Focus, Stepping out of Poverty, 1998.

Malnutrition amongst children is cited by almost everyone as a major problem. Interviewing in Shegnan, NAC recorded how both the doctor and the women expressed concerns at the degree of malnutrition amongst the children. All the children observed were stunted in their growth: 'most 8 year-olds looked four.' The AfghanAid report found child mortality high in all three districts they surveyed, with more than a quarter of children in all districts dying before age 13. Rates were particularly high in the first five years, with almost one child in five dying before reaching age six. Focus has undertaken monitoring alongside its distributions in 10 districts and reports 5% moderate malnutrition and 1.2% severe malnutrition. The worst figures are found in Wakhan, with 6.2% moderate malnutrition and 71% stunting. On the other hand, MSF in Eshkeshem said that the nutrition situation did not give cause for concern.

In September 2000, ACF undertook a nutrition survey in Faizabad.[42] The global acute malnutrition score was 8.9%, a higher rate than that found in other cities. This they believed was related to three factors, the first concerned with the time of survey – which was conducted at the end of the summer, a time when diarrhoea and associated malnutrition always increase in Afghanistan - the other two concerned general living conditions in Faizabad. The first of these other factors relates to the precarious food security situation in the province, believed to be one of the most food-insecure in the country. The second concerned the overall health environment, the lack of primary health care facilities, low vaccination rates, low use of maternal and child health services, lack of education about basic hygiene and a poor sanitation situation. The rate of chronic malnutrition (severe stunting 19.7%, stunting 47.0%) was similar to Herat and lower than Kandahar and Kabul, but was nevertheless extremely high. Child feeding practices were seen as another problem, with weaning foods introduced too early and children given insufficiently balanced foods and foods not well adapted to the age of the child.

Opium addiction is a problem in a number of places, not only in itself but because it takes scare resources away from meeting the need for food. Informants in Wakhan calculated that ten days supply of opium costs three sers of wheat at the beginning of the year, one ser immediately before harvest, and half a ser at harvest time. In 1995 AfghanAid calculated that even a light smoker would in a year consume the equivalent of 485kg of wheat, enough to feed an average family for three to four months.

Serious addiction occurs in Wakhan, Shegnan, Eshkeshem and Zebak and amongst certain communities in Darwaz. A 1995 UNDCP survey estimated that there were between 7,000 and 9,000 opium addicts in Badakhshan, using on average four grams a day. Other estimates suggest the amount consumed is higher than this, from one tooli (18.5gms) a day to one tooli every three or four days. A conservative estimate is that at least half the households in Wakhan and two thirds of those in Eshkeshem and Shegnan have at least one member who is an addict. Estimates go as high as 90% of all adults in some villages.[43] Children sometimes become addicted in infancy due to the use of opium as a medicine or to quieten children. The Focus report spoke of praise for the ORA detoxification clinics, but the people we interviewed all said that

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Women & children have to walk several days to get to the nearest Health Care Centre

[42] ACF, Faizabad 2000.
[43] Focus 1998.

most people returned to the habit. This seems not unlikely given that they are returning to the same social conditions that gave rise to the habit in the first place.

Focus also reports an increase in heroin users in communities bordering Tajikistan. This is a new problem and was not evident even six years ago.

Health Interventions

MSF support two main activities in the Faizabad hospital – outpatient MCH service and the in-patient service for children and women. The outpatient activities are comprised of consultations for pregnancy and family planning for women, and the clinic also provides a nutritional intervention. Iron and drugs to treat complications due to pregnancy are provided, along with contraception. MSF report that the attendance is increasing even for family planning (from 70 to 100 women per month). On the in-patient side there is a delivery room which deals with normal deliveries (20 to 30% of cases), complicated deliveries (10%), and post-delivery complications like placenta retention, incomplete abortion and post partum infections and bleeding (25% to 45% of cases).

In addition to these services in the hospital, MSF also supports the clinics in Baharak, Eshkeshem and Zeebak. MSF reported that having a female obstetrics and gynaecological doctor and a midwife was a real breakthrough for the women's health activities. Consultations for pregnant women were scheduled twice a week, with a focus on health education and the identification of complications. Systematic referral to the vaccination room of UNICEF is done. Post-natal care and requests for family planning happen every day. New protocols were started in order to improve the follow-up of pregnant women. Systematic distribution of iodine started in May, as well as systematic detection of goiters.

In Baharak approximately one thousand pregnant women benefited from the services in 2000. There was an increase in women having more than two consultations during pregnancy - a good indicator of a better understanding of the use of a proper follow-up. However, the number of post-natal consultations was still low; women were staying home 40 days after delivery and would only move to the clinic with severe signs such as bleeding, high pains, fever, showing placenta retention and/or genital infection - by which time they often had to be referred to Faizabad.

MSF completed a TBA training program in Eshkeshem and has established a programme of a regular follow up of the TBAs, with a field visit from the nurse in charge, a monthly refresher course/meeting at the clinic, and records of activity. In general, though, the availability of TBAs was very variable and there was no information on their level of training. People said that some of the older women act as 'dias' but that they were not trained. Most problems during birth are taken care of by relatives or by the mullah, who would give amulets or written verses from the Koran. MoPH reported major problems with earlier WHO training of TBAs. Over five years 260 were trained but there was reportedly a lack of follow-up and it is not now known how many are practising. MoPH say they wish to have a programme of phased training for TABs with regular follow-up but that their 'hand is empty' and they are reliant on what the international community brings. They also have plans to increase the number of MCH clinics in the province – at present there are five, they plan to have ten.

Vaccination activities are supervised by WHO and mass vaccination campaigns for polio and measles are run in collaboration with UNICEF. The AfghanAid report states that in Argu, Warduj and Zebak, immunisation rates for BCG, DTP, OPV and measles were high (between 75 and 93%), but the percentage of women vaccinated against tetanus was low (between 48% in Argu and 27% in Zebak). However, the recent deaths in Ragh and Shar-i-Buzurg suggest that this state of affairs is not typical. ACF also noted low immunisation coverage for measles (for children above nine months) and for tetanus for mothers.

MoPH noted that staff in Keshem had reported a decrease in malaria this year because of distribution of bed nets.[44]

There has been a TB programme running since 1996 and supported by WHO, but there are major problems in follow up for patients coming from remote rural areas, with doctors reporting that most patients did not return to Faizabad to complete TB

[44] WHO supplied the bednets and SCA administered the programme, supplying bed nets through their clinics.

treatment. The commitment of the authorities towards the TB programmes was thought to be good, although they did not have many resources to offer. Most anti TB drugs are easily available in the bazaar.

In terms of nutrition programmes, Focus has recently started to give dry rations to children in 10 districts, accompanied by measurement of children. MSF also has programmes running out of its clinics in Baharak and Eshkeshem. In Eshkeshem the number of defaulters are low, but MSF are unsure of the success of the programme in Baharak as weight gains are below recommended figures and the default rate is high. They have started a programme of research to try and understand the reasons for defaulting.

The AfghanAid survey reported that health education had been provided to 41% of the population in Zebak, 34% in Argu and only 1.5% in Warduj. Health education did not seem to make much difference to immunisation rates, increasing them only by about 10% in Zebak and 6% in Argu. In some cases a negative correlation was experienced for which no explanation was given. Levels of familiarity with ORS as a treatment for diarrhoea were low and did not appear to be significantly improved by health education.

Human Resources

The medical cadres in the province include male and female doctors, mid level health workers, nurses, midwives, laboratory technicians, X-ray technicians, physiotherapists and pharmacists. Most of the skilled staff are concentrated in Faizabad and the 'specialists' are all working in the city. These specialists are not necessarily those who have undergone the recognised training, rather most have had short courses and/or some experience. There is a senior physician and obstetrician in the hospital. All of these people have been trained in earlier years. Some new graduates from the University of Balkh have come to the province; however, there has been little development of new health manpower in the whole of Afghanistan. The policy of the authorities not to allow the doctors to leave has kept many of them in the area, though this has relaxed a bit recently.

The clinics have differing staffing patterns. The MSF clinics in Baharak and Eskeshem have female doctors. The SCA clinics will have female doctors in their MCH clinics, male doctors in their C1clinics, and mid level health workers in their C2 clinics.

Merlin (who worked in Badakhshan until 1998) had supported the training of nurses when there was a nursing school attached to the hospital. The support was material and technical. This school trained mostly young women from the city and did not contribute to the district female health manpower. Many young men did come from the districts. The nursing school had been run by the authorities and the teaching staff were all doctors who had no knowledge or experience of teaching nurses. There is no new training of any of the other cadres.

Environmental Health Issues

Access to clean water and to adequate sanitation are important determinants of people's health. In Badakhshan access to clean water was extremely variable. From the 45 villages surveyed for this report, figures ranged from 11 villages claiming 95-100% of the population had access to clean water to 24 villages saying zero percent had access. AfghanAid reported that spring water was the major source of drinking water in the villages they surveyed but that in only in three villages had springs been improved. Urban areas generally have very poor water and children in Faizabad and Keshem can regularly be seen fetching drinking water from filthy ditches. UNOPS have supported a well digging programme in Keshem town, but the high water table has caused problems with pollution.

Even when water is clean at source, lack of sanitation means that it may well become contaminated before use. In only six of the villages surveyed did more than half the population have access to sanitation, and even then the latrines are often not used. In 15 villages there was no sanitation at all. Frequent use of drinking water sources by animals also means that it is likely to be contaminated. In 2000, the drought created a further problem, with a general reduction in availability of water. Springs in Yaftal and Shar-i-Buzurg, for example, gave only 25% of their normal output.

Agency Activity

There has been a long history of agency involvement in Badakhshan, although the pattern is uneven with some districts having virtually no agency activity. Furthermore, despite the fact that some agencies have made a deliberate effort to work in remote areas, there is still overall a concentration of activity in areas accessible from roads.

Agencies themselves have very different patterns of working. From the UN side, WFP is by far the largest player, distributing 9,729 MT of wheat in 2000 (compared to 4,709MT in 1999). A clear policy decision was taken in 2000 to avoid free wheat distribution and go for FFW because of the difficulty of targeting the right beneficiaries and a wish not to undermine FFW by handing out free food. Lack of NGO implementing capacity has been a problem and WFP pioneered community-implemented FFW schemes, some of which worked very well whilst others were less successful.

Focus is the other agency to have a large amount of wheat and they both undertake free food distributions (which are untargeted)[45] and give wheat to other NGOs for FFW.

A large amount of the FFW has gone on road construction. In 2000 alone 490 km of roads were improved through FFW schemes. Acted, AfghanAid, Oxfam and NAC all implemented road improvement schemes with FFW, in addition to some schemes which WFP undertook directly with the community.

Of the other UN agencies, UNICEF supports education throughout the province by the provision of educational materials, resources for teacher training and provision of an educational database. It also supports work in the health sector. WHO has a small local staff to support health activities and FAO also have a small presence, with a local staff member working in Faizabad district but with few resources. The UNOPS programme seems somewhat problematic. They have worked with community organisations in Faizabad and Keshem areas, but in Faizabad the women's organisation they set up parallels another women's organisation set up several years earlier (and still active), though both have different political allegiances. They have also built a number of clinic buildings which still stand empty. UNOCHA provide overall co-ordination, flights and some emergency grants.

ICRC do not have a major long term presence in the area, preferring to work through their partner ARCS, but they do have the capacity to gear up quickly in case of emergencies and they mounted major programmes in response to the earthquake and IDPs. This has sometimes created tensions between them and agencies with a longer-term presence.

Of the NGOs working in the area, NAC and AfghanAid have been there longest and, along with Focus, have the biggest programmes. Both NAC and AfghanAid have multi sectoral programmes and work in a number of districts. Focus supports its programmes from the Tajikistan side; so far these have been largely geared to distributions, although there are plans to move more into FFW and even longer-term development. They have also steadily increased the districts in which they work. SCA has a small agricultural programme in Keshem and undertakes health and education work in a number of districts. Oxfam has a substantial programme in Shar-i-Buzurg but does not work in any other districts. Acted is mainly working over the border in Takhar but does undertake some emergency and rural rehabilitation work in Badakhshan. Concern has a few small projects in a number of districts, ORA is specifically focused on drug rehabilitation and MCI is very new to the area. Medair has plans to begin health work in 2001.

Co-ordination

Most agencies believed that information sharing between agencies working in the province had improved, but that there was still some way to go in terms of real co-ordination. It is clear that, as in most places, issues of agency profile have sometimes got in the way of good co-ordination – and this is true of both NGO and UN agencies.

Communication problems between the staff based in the field and staff at the country programme office have also been an issue for a number of organisations, and this has compounded the co-ordination problem. This is exacerbated by the fact that many organisations do not have senior staff in the field in Badakhshan.

Different operational bases add to the difficulty. Focus, for example, operates its Badakhshan

[45] Focus staff say that they intend in 2001 to move away from general distributions to targeted FFW.

programme out of Khorog in Tajikistan, which increases the problems of co-ordination with other agencies who are Peshawar/Islamabad based. The other side of this coin is, however, that this base enables Focus to reach areas that other agencies do not have access to. The problem of coordination with Focus was exacerbated by the fact that its main office for Badakhshan was in Baharak, whilst all other agencies were Faizabad based. Focus staff were aware of the problems and moved their office to Faizabad last September and are appointing senior staff to work from there; they believe that this will greatly improve co-ordination.

Impact

Whilst it is not within the remit of this study to evaluate individual agency programmes, it is clear that any assessment of overall impact can only be derived from looking at the work on the ground. In doing this, it becomes clear that despite some very good work there are also some serious problems. There are a number of reasons for this.

One is that lack of senior staff input into Badakhshan has clearly had an impact on quality. AfghanAid has suffered particularly because its reliance on Dfid funding has meant that for more than two years it has been unable to send expatriate staff into the country. It is, however, by no means the only organisation to have been unable to support its Badakhshan work adequately. The scale of the crisis in Afghanistan in 2000 meant that many agencies were over-stretched and did not have the staff to give proper support to programmes. WFP and UNOCHA were the only UN organisations to put senior staff resources into Badakhshan last year. In particular the lack of senior staff, and thus of leadership, from FAO and UNICEF were noted with regret. NAC and MSF were the only NGOs last year to give serious expatriate support to their Badakhshan programmes. This is not to argue that programmes necessarily need resident expatriate managers, but they do need adequate levels of support (both technical and managerial) and this does involve spending time in the province.

Secondly, the capacity did not exist last year in Badakhshan to meet the scale of the needs. In general the agency response to conflict-related IDPs was seen to be good, with primary responsibility remaining with the authorities, in conjunction in

Dr. Eqbal

Afghan Aid Workers

some areas with ARCS. Medical facilities were deemed satisfactory, with SCA and MSF strengthening their medical assistance. However, the scale of the drought proved beyond existing agency capacity. Although areas were covered to the best extent possible, and this relieved pressure of people moving into Faizabad town, by spring many people in the worst affected districts had completely run out of food.

FFW helped reduce poppy cultivation in some areas (or at least to offset the loss in income caused by not growing)[46] and reduced the pressure to migrate in search of paid labour – which, in any case, was not much to be found in 2000. On the negative side, however, there was sometimes a significant loss of wheat to commanders, this being a particular problem where there was inadequate supervision of projects. Major FFW schemes can also be detrimental to development programmes, and there were a number of reports of situations where people had refused to undertake community participation because they were working on FFW schemes.

Road improvement schemes were the major way by which FFW was delivered and these were considered to be of great benefit by community leaders, opening up access to bazaars (with consequent reduction in prices), to health care, and to education, especially for senior boys. Roads also lower the cost of other projects and can increase agency activity in the more remote parts of the province.[47] How much they help the poorest and how much they help women is more open to doubt. It is also unclear what their negative effects might be.

On the whole agencies are seen as having a positive impact on security, notwithstanding some of the problems mentioned earlier in relation to leakage of wheat. A number of agencies spoke of using their influence as resource-providers to negotiate for better security. For example, in Hazrat-i Sayyed, NAC found that girls from one side of the village were unable to attend the NAC-supported school because of insecurity. At the time they were part way through another project and by refusing to complete it unless the dispute was solved they managed, after two days of negotiations, to get the commanders to make an agreement to resolve the dispute. The girls from both side of the village finished the educational year and the project implementation continued with no more problems. Focus also spoke of using food to leverage better security, clearly saying to communities that they could not work unless there was peace and stability. It is not clear, however, whether that impact lasts beyond the immediate life of the project.

Dr. Eqbal

NGO Worker

The most worrying aspect in terms of impact is that there is no agreed long-term strategy in any of the key sectors, though individual agencies might have their own strategies.

In health, relations with the authorities seem good but lack of an overall strategy means impact is not as great as it could be and there is a very uneven level of provision across the district. MSF does some high quality work but it reaches only a small percentage of the population and other parts of the province have been left with a fairly low level of

[46] It is difficult to make a clear link as several things were happening at once: the Aga Khan's edict, NGOs' negotiating that they would only do FFW if poppy growing was stopped, the fact that the drought made 2000 a bad year for poppy growing, the general fall in prices caused by over-supply, and tightening border controls.

[47] For example a noticeable increase in agency interest in Ragh has been observed since the road was undertaken.

support, if anything. A much more comprehensive coverage of basic health care is needed. This should include health education and community based services, including much more training of TBAs. The latter will, however, need to be properly followed up and supported, otherwise it will be of little use. Systems will need to be developed to refer people to clinics where appropriate. Levels of immunisation could be much improved, especially in the remote areas – as evidenced by the number of children who died of measles over the winter. Currently, apart from Baharak, emergency obstetric care is not available in the clinics and caesarian sections are only performed in the provincial hospital. With the logistical problems the province faces, development of emergency obstetric care is necessary to reduce maternal mortality and morbidity.

It is clear that agency support to education is greatly valued, it is less clear what it achieves. Again, the lack of an overall strategy is a major problem, and UNICEF's decision to put resources into this area in 2001 is to be welcomed. There are clearly issues about the quality and appropriateness of provision. More of the same is not the answer. Children learn to read and write in situations where, with the exception of the few villages that have box libraries, there are no materials to keep literacy going. They do not learn the basics of health care or how to protect the environment. The curriculum from grade 7-12 includes 14 subjects, but there are no qualified teachers to teach them and virtually no materials. The quality of both secondary and tertiary education is extremely low. Teacher training is insufficient, there is little classroom support and no coherent strategy for supporting salaries. There has been little development of alternatives to formal schools even though many children, particularly girls, cannot access the formal system. There is no agreement as to what children are being educated for, of how education relates to culture, or of what constitutes quality. There is little understanding of why children go to school, or why they drop out. Yet there is an enormous community enthusiasm for education that could be harnessed.

Perhaps most worrying is the livelihoods situation. Although exacerbated by the drought, the problems of Badakhshan are deep-rooted and if not tackled in a systematic way they will continue to recur as serial crises. Yet it is not clear that the assistance effort has as yet had much impact on long term poverty. At present we know little about how people cope and how the various components of their livelihoods fit together, either at a household or a village level. There is no coherent agricultural strategy for the province, nor the understanding upon which to build one. A number of agencies undertake some work in agriculture but it is piecemeal and uncoordinated. This lack of co-ordination and leadership will seriously inhibit recovery programmes. It is clear that there has been a major loss of assets and an associated increase in vulnerability; it is not clear what the solution to this is. Although there is discussion of the need for a seed programme, there appears to be no analysis of how this might work for different sections of the community, who might benefit and who might be impoverished, what effect it will have on social relations. There is also no clear strategy in relation to environmental issues or to rangeland management, nor is there a comprehensive policy in relation to livestock.

Urban areas pose even more of a problem as there is very little understanding of how the urban economy functions, and thus of what opportunities there might be for intervention. There are certainly skill shortages but no one as yet has done anything about addressing this issue, nor at looking at the role of credit in either the urban or rural economy. Given the usurious rates extracted by those offering loans linked to poppy production, this is clearly a major issue.[48]

As noted at the beginning of this section, despite the efforts of a few agencies, activity tends to cluster along roads. In particular, the districts of Darwaz, Khwahan, Ragh, Shegnan, Wakhan (except along the Eshkeshem to Khandud road), Shar-i-Buzurg, Darayam, Teshkan and Upper Keshem Valley have seen very little agency work. The smaller pockets of Khosh, Sarghilan and Shohadda are also neglected but are likely to remain a problem because of the poor security situation in these districts.

Some agencies are still very Peshawar based and this is both an expensive use of resources and renders them unable to operate in uncertain security. It was, for example, noticeable that when the Taliban first took Taloqan some agencies withdrew not only their

[48] There is solid experience in other areas of Afghanistan which could be drawn to develop appropriate interventions here, for example SC-US's long running credit programmes in Mazar and north Afghanistan.

expatriate staff but also their senior Afghan staff (as their base was Peshawar) and effectively ceased to function for many months at a time of emergency.

Constraints

The difficulties of working in Badakhshan are many, but they are not insuperable.

The isolation of the province is a problem. Better flight access would help: at present agencies have a choice of very irregular ICRC flights or very expensive UN ones, or they charter Pactec.[49] But most of Badakhshan is far even from Faizabad and it is necessary for agencies to develop ways of working that fit with a remote area with a long winter season. More recruitment of, and investment in, local staff is needed.

Logistics are a particular problem given the combination of remoteness and political isolation, and it is a problem that has become worse since the Taliban took Taloqan – the main supply route for most goods. Better co-operation amongst agencies in accessing goods from Tajikistan would help in this regard.

Security is another problem, not just because of inter-factional fighting but also because of the nearness to frontlines. But it is rarely at a level that stops work altogether and those agencies that have invested in good local staff have been able to continue working on a more or less continuous basis.

Finding ways to work well in Badakhshan does however require a long-term commitment to the area and this in turn means funding. Lack of a secure funding base has been a problem for a lot of agencies.

Hermione Youngs

Relief aid going into Shar-i-Buzurg

[49] A small NGO airline.

Key Recommendations

Overall

1. An agreed inter-agency strategy needs to be developed for the province in the three key areas of livelihoods, health and education. It should have clear targets, be realistic and achievable within 3- 5 years. It should clearly focus on priorities – a comprehensive plan that is outside the capacity of agencies to deliver, or the willingness of donors to fund, will not be helpful.
2. Working groups should be set up for the three main areas of work. Each should have a lead person who has the necessary time and skills to give real leadership to the work in that sector.
3. Key indicators should be agreed to measure progress, and a system set up for monitoring.

Livelihoods

1. Recognising that we have both an immediate problem and a long term one there needs to be a twin-track approach.
2. Research should be undertaken to understand how different sectors of the community have coped with the drought and how best to support their recovery.
3. A recovery programme should be designed with clear targets and indicators to match. It should be monitored and information fed back in an ongoing action-research process.
4. At the same time it has to be recognised that people are hungry now and programmes have to be put in place to meet these immediate needs.
5. It may be that given the dual nature of the problem, two lead people should be appointed, one for the short term and one the long. It is, however, important that they work closely together so that the short term supports the long and does not undermine it.
6. Roles for the different agencies, UN and NGO, should be agreed in such a way that they complement each other and maximise impact.

Education

1. Research should be undertaken into the quality and appropriateness of provision, issues of access and of drop out, community support for education and the role of alternatives to formal schools. All of this should specifically look at the situation of girls as well as boys.
2. An education strategy should be developed which looks at the range of issues identified in this report, including materials, support to teachers and salaries for teachers. The strategy should take into account the fact that whilst all children need skills for life, Afghanistan also needs an education strategy that will allow some to progress to be the professionals that the country will continue to need.
3. As with livelihoods, targets and indicators should be defined and an on going process of action research entered into.

Health

1. A plan for more comprehensive coverage of basic health care, including health education and community based services, should be developed. This should include more training of TBAs - properly followed up and supported.
2. Systems will need to be developed to refer people to clinics where appropriate.
3. Levels of immunisation should be improved, especially in the remote areas.
4. MoPH should be involved in health planning.
5. Again, targets and indicators should be developed.

Donors

1. This work cannot be done without funding. Donors need to take at least a medium term view of the problem and to recognise that even emergency interventions cannot be adequately undertaken without an investment in organisations and people.
2. Donors should be asked to back the Badakhshan plan on a 3-5 year basis, on the clear agreement that targets will be set, indicators agreed, and agencies hold themselves accountable to these.
3. The plan should be considered a pilot and a sum of money be set aside for an independent evaluation process that will feed in findings in a on-going way.