

Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit  
Case Study Series

Afghanistan Livelihood  
Trajectories  
Evidence from Sar-i-Pul



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AREU was established in 2002 by the assistance community working in Afghanistan and has a board of directors with representation from donors, the United Nations and other multilateral agencies, and non-governmental organisations. AREU currently receives core funds from the governments of Finland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Specific projects have been funded by the Foundation of the Open Society Institute Afghanistan (FOSIA), the Asia Foundation (TAF), the European Commission (EC), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the World Bank.

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## Glossary

<i>ailaq</i>	pasture, place of seasonal migration of pastoralists
<i>ashar</i>	system of group labour, customarily offered freely or compensated symbolically, e.g. with a meal
<i>ashnai</i>	familiarity
<i>askar</i>	literally “soldier,” referring in historical context to conscripted soldiers
<i>baqali</i>	informal trade of goods transported between locations
<i>bai</i>	a wealthy man (regional term, equivalent to <i>khan</i> elsewhere in Afghanistan)
<i>daymakar’ha</i>	rain-fed land farmers
<i>ganda</i>	water storage pool
<i>gillim</i>	type of carpet
<i>haj</i>	pilgrimage to Mecca
<i>haram</i>	unclean or prohibited according to Islam
<i>jallab</i>	a person doing <i>jallabi</i>
<i>jallabi</i>	trader, usually meaning livestock trader
<i>jamadar</i>	wage labour broker, recruiting on behalf of employer
<i>jaroo</i>	type of shrub used to make a traditional broom; also used to define the broom itself
<i>jerib</i>	unit of land measurement; equivalent to one-fifth of a hectare
<i>karakul</i>	type of sheep, referring also to skins and products made from it
<i>madrassa</i>	religious school
<i>mirab</i>	traditional community figurehead negotiating water access between villages
<i>namad</i>	type of felt rug
<i>pao</i>	unit of weight, approximately 380 grams
<i>qaryadar</i>	traditional community figurehead responsible for village affairs; in some areas, a <i>qaryadar</i> is sometimes referred to as a <i>malik</i> .
<i>qawm</i>	a complex Afghan political and social term which is often too simply translated as “tribe” or “clan”; based upon the context in which it is used, it can mean an identity group ranging in scope from family to ethnicity
<i>sawab</i>	Islamic concept of a good deed, a benevolent act performed without expectations of reward in the mortal life
<i>shal</i>	woven pattern textile made from wool; used as basis for various crafts
<i>Sharia</i>	Islamic system of law
<i>shinasa</i>	an acquaintance
<i>shura</i>	group of elders
<i>siyaldari</i>	concept of competition between <i>qawm</i> in terms of adherence to accepted norms and behaviours
<i>taqawi</i>	small amounts of informal in-kind credit, often foodstuffs, typically repaid at harvest time
<i>tikadar</i>	employer of plant or business employing many people, often through <i>jamadars</i>
<i>toshak</i>	mattress
<i>woliswal</i>	district governor
<i>woliswali</i>	district government office
<i>zagher</i>	crop-yielding seed, used to make oil

## Acronyms

AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
ALT	Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories
ANP	Afghan National Police
CDC	Community Development Council
GAA	German AgroAction
EC	European Commission
MAIL	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
UNDSS	United Nations Department of Safety and Security
WFP	World Food Programme

## Executive Summary

This study examines the dynamics of rural poverty experienced in three villages of Sar-i-Pul Province over a 7-8 year period. It forms part of a larger study, the Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories (ALT) project, which explored rural livelihood change in four provinces of Afghanistan: Badakhshan, Kandahar, Faryab and Sar-i-Pul. The study built on a baseline research project conducted by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) in 2002-3, providing a unique opportunity to follow the changes in rural livelihoods of a selection of the same households. By studying their stories in depth, the study aims to create a greater understanding of what has driven changes in welfare and livelihood security throughout the years, and shed light on the changes in the context within which people lead their lives.

Evidence from the Sar-i-Pul research sites shows a pronounced deterioration, across all study villages and households, over the period in question. The severe drought in northern Afghanistan from 2006-2008, combined with record-level food prices, led to acute food shortages and livelihood stress for the majority of households in 2008-9. Coping strategies such as extensive borrowing, risky international migration, and the early marriage of daughters indicated the severity of the stress experienced. In a context of very limited aid and external support, the study investigated how households navigated this period of economic hardship with the resources they had and made difficult trade-offs to sustain their families, often at the cost of future security. Given the nature of migration that has taken place, high levels of debt and economic obstacles to recommencing farming, livelihood recovery in the absence of support is likely to take some time. Resilience to future shocks, given the nature of coping responses available to study respondents, is likely to take even more time to build up.

The study argues that macro- and meso-level institutions have, until now, had limited impact on the livelihoods of study respondents. External assistance from development actors and the government in the province has led to some modest infrastructural and service provision improvement. However, the relatively small volumes and intermittent nature of such assistance, often distributed inequitably through local institutions, have not provided much in the way of security for poorer households. The perception of formal governance structures as distant, unresponsive and ineffective has reinforced reliance for many on social resources as a means of access to goods and services as well as a safety net for times of difficulty. While such local mechanisms should be acknowledged for their strength and resilience, this study argues that the social and economic arrangements on which they are based often do not favour the poor, and do not provide a realistic escape from poverty in the long term. In comparison, softer institutions such as family and kinship have long provided a greater degree of economic and physical security, and their importance is evidenced by the prominent role of marriage, as a means to both social reproduction and economic security.

Evidence also points to how households attempt to offset many of the risks and vulnerabilities inherent in their livelihoods. Markets for food, labour and other goods are highlighted as sources of particular risk and concern, especially in light of the recent 2007-8 food crisis. As such, subsistence farming is important in achieving a degree of independence from risky markets, even in a context where land ownership and access is comparatively low.





# 1. Introduction and Study Background

From 2002-2004, the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), in partnership with seven nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), implemented an 18-month European Commission-funded research project monitoring the livelihoods of 390 households across 21 villages in seven districts in seven provinces.<sup>1</sup> The provinces and districts were selected to provide case study examples of contrast with respect to agro-ecology and economy. The aim of the research was to build understanding of rural livelihoods in Afghanistan on the grounds that much of policy and programming practice was largely based on preconceptions of what people in rural areas did, and that it focused on delivery of programmes and paid little attention to understanding the context within which people lived.

The key findings of the 2002 research pointed to a considerable degree of diversification in rural household economies with many drawing a significant if not a major part of their income (in cash and kind) from non-farm labour, with migration being common.<sup>2</sup> The majority of poor households accessed most of their grain from the market and non-farm labour was their most important source of income, questioning a widespread assumption, then and now, of “80 percent of the population being dependent on agriculture.”

In 2008, AREU secured new research funding from the Economic and Social Research Council of the United Kingdom<sup>3</sup> to revisit a selection of the sites and households to investigate how their circumstances had changed and to consider what factors might have brought these changes about. The focus of new research was therefore on livelihood trajectories.<sup>4</sup> Five of the original provinces were selected for the restudy: Badakhshan, Faryab, Kandahar, Herat and Sar-i-Pul. Ghazni and Laghman were dropped at the design stage because of insecurity. Herat was abandoned after the restudy commenced because of insecurity in the Hari Rud Valley. In Faryab, the research was also modified because of security issues. This report reviews the evidence on household livelihood trajectories and discusses what might be learned with respect to three villages in Sar-i-Pul.

Four major questions have structured this study:

- What have been the livelihood trajectories and welfare outcomes of the study Afghan households throughout the years? How are these differentiated by gender, socioeconomic position, community and context?
- What practices have households, under diverse contexts of conflict, implemented in relation to market choices and use of social and human capital to cope with insecurity? To what extent have these practices mitigated or reproduced insecurity and contributed to or undermined resilience? How has insecurity affected household strategies and welfare outcomes?
- What do these livelihood trajectories tell us about the meaning of local formal and informal structures and how households and contrasting communities have adapted to and engaged with state absence? What does this tell us about the nature of resilience, its scope, reach, and the inclusiveness of its mechanisms?

1 The provinces were Badakhshan, Faryab, Ghazni, Herat, Kandahar, Laghman and Sar-i-Pul.

2 Jo Grace and Adam Pain, *Rethinking Rural Livelihoods in Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2004).

3 “Development in the Raw: Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories,” Grant RES-167-25-0285, Economic and Social Research Council.

4 A livelihood trajectory may be defined as “the consequences of the changing way in which individuals construct a livelihood over time.”

- To what extent do trajectories of change reflect path dependency<sup>5</sup> or the capacity of individuals or communities to bring about changes through collective action? If there have been shifts, where, for whom and how have they been possible?

Part of the argument made in the research proposal was that much of the effort in the Afghanistan state-building exercise has focused on the creation of formal institutions of the state and of formal legal structures of governance, law, security and markets. Little attention has been paid to existing traditional institutions. At best it has been assumed that they are nonexistent: that there are no customary institutions for dispute resolution, for example, or that credit was unavailable because of the absence of formal financial institutions. More often informal institutions have been seen as problematic: unaccountable, unjust or inequitable. Much of the thinking behind the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), for example, is based on a negative view of existing authority structures. NSP has sought to replace them with formal village structures (Community Development Councils or CDCs) as part of a process of building democratic structures from the village upwards. Another strand of thinking sees informality as illegal and criminal, a view to which the dynamics of the opium economy have undoubtedly contributed.

A growing body of evidence emphasises the fact that rural Afghan households have demonstrated a significant degree of resilience throughout various crises. In 2001, a humanitarian agenda drove the initial international response, with assumptions of destruction and disaster, despite field evidence that suggested otherwise.<sup>6</sup> While there was evidence of chronic malnutrition, assessments showed little incidence of acute malnutrition. Equally, grain markets did not fail during conflict. Claims of a cash crisis<sup>7</sup> and the dearth of credit<sup>8</sup> were not supported by evidence.<sup>9</sup> The investigation of the nature of this resilience, the social practices that have contributed to it, and the extent to which this resilience has been affected by reconstruction processes over these last several years have been a critical part of this study.

This report will begin by outlining the methodological approach taken to study livelihood change (Section 2), before examining the context-specific factors which shape the livelihoods of the study households in Section 3. Section 4 aims to describe and compare livelihood outcomes across the study sites, offering household-level evidence to explain the differences, while Section 5 examines the responses taken by households to adverse livelihood factors. The study pays particular attention to the role of social resources in mediating interaction with formal institutions (Section 6), and concludes by emphasising important findings relevant to supporting rural livelihoods (Section 7).

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5 Path dependency is the idea that previous events pre-determine subsequent possibilities or household history.

6 Adam Pain and Jacky Sutton, "Introduction: Reconstructing Agriculture in Afghanistan" in *Reconstructing Agriculture in Afghanistan*, ed. Adam Pain and Jacky Sutton, 1-10 (Rome and Rugby: FAO and Practical Action, 2007).

7 S. Lautze, E. Stites, N. Nojumi and F. Najimi, "Qaht-e-Pool: 'A Cash Famine': Food Insecurity in Afghanistan, 1999-2002" (Medford, MA: Feinstein International Famine Centre, Tufts University, 2002).

8 S. Rasmusson, "The Current Situation of Rural Finance in Afghanistan" in *Rural Finance in Afghanistan: The Challenges of the Opium Economy*, 20-24 (Kabul: World Bank, 2005).

9 Floortje Klijn and Adam Pain, "Finding the Money: Informal Credit Practices in Rural Afghanistan" (Kabul: AREU, 2007).

## 2. Methodology

This section has two parts. The first presents the methodological rationale and background to the research project. The second outlines the stages of the data collection process.

### 2.1 Research approach

The core of the evidence collection draws on detailed household interviews seeking to identify changes in household circumstances since 2002-3. Focusing on a detailed examination of economic, social and historical dimensions of household livelihoods, it aimed to achieve a holistic understanding of livelihood change and of the factors that have brought it about. As this research was interested in variability and difference, it used qualitative depth to investigate causalities. This contrasts with the more conventional multi-household cross sectional surveys (e.g. Afghanistan National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment [NRVA]), where data is predominantly quantitative, and the understanding of causalities generated through statistical techniques and hypothesis testing.

Framed in the examination of meso- and macro-level factors influencing livelihood trajectories, the study examined the role of institutions in providing livelihood security and the broader economic and political factors shaping livelihood outcomes. Particular attention has been paid to the role of social structures at the local level, and the ways in which they may simultaneously promote and limit freedom of choice, and enable people to escape poverty and advance. Therefore, the research sought to understand not only what changes had taken place and why, but also the changes in the context within which people manage their livelihoods.

### 2.2 Interview procedure

Household interviews were undertaken by an experienced team of two male and two female field researchers, supplemented at times by additional team members. Interviews commenced in June 2008, and were completed in June 2009, therefore capturing the effects of seasonality throughout the year—the latter stages of a severe drought as well as the arrival of rains in Sar-i-Pul in April 2009. Three field missions were undertaken for each study village (nine in total), first for the purpose of introductory interviews with the 20 households who made up the original sample in the previous study and for general focus group discussions, typically taking around two weeks. Two subsequent field missions (approximately three weeks each) were undertaken to conduct two rounds of household interviews, both with the male and female heads of eight households selected for the in-depth interview stage. A period in between the two rounds of interviews was taken to review and analyse the collected information and ensure optimal targeting of questions, and therefore data quality, for the second interviews. The interview procedure followed a number of stages, summarised as follows.

*Household profile:* In the original 2002 study, households (approximately 20 households per village) were selected out of a village wealth-ranking exercise with the guidance of local elders and community leaders. The number of households selected from each wealth group was roughly proportional to the relative number of households in each wealth group in the village. Using the 2002 household data, a household profile was prepared for each of the originally interviewed households. The profile summarised basic data on household composition and economy in 2002-3.

*Introductory (or preliminary) interviews:* The AREU interview team introduced themselves to the village, holding a focus group discussion with both men (ordinarily elders) and women in order to collect general information about the village itself, and changes in livelihoods since 2002-3. A series of introductory discussions then followed with all

the original sample households that were present in the village. These preliminary interviews, informed by the household profiles, explored changes that had happened in the household (composition, economy, etc.) and looked for evidence on changing household fortunes (improving, maintaining or declining). These preliminary interview transcripts were then translated and comparisons made with the 2002 base household profile.

*Household selection:* Based on the preliminary interview evidence, a sub-sample of eight households, proportional to the number of households in each wealth group in the original 20-household sample, was selected for further interviews. The criteria for the selection was first to find household contrasts in changing fortunes across and within the wealth groups and then within these choose households of contrasting size, structure and age. This selection was made by the lead researchers, informed through consultation with the field researchers.

*Household interview guides:* Based on the selections, detailed household interview guides were prepared for each household selected for interview. The interview guides identified key themes and issues to be followed up over the four interviews held—two with the responsible man and two with the responsible woman of the household. Although the content of each interview guide was structured around eight common themes,<sup>10</sup> each was tailored to the specific household drawing on changes reported by the household in the preliminary interview. Particular issues of interest, such as village histories, shopkeeper credit and NGO project activities, were followed up with relevant individuals in supplementary “key informant” interviews.

*Household interviews:* Household interviews were carried out by the male and female teams, usually with the head of the household and the oldest woman (in the case of joint households). Occasionally, sons, daughters or daughters-in-law were interviewed when the head of the household was away, or the intended respondent was sick. In a minority of cases, one longer interview was undertaken with a respondent due to their unavailability for a second. A locally hired interpreter assisted the female project staff for the majority of interviews in Villages A and B, where Uzbeki was the language spoken by most of the women respondents. The teams were able to work without an interpreter in Village C, using Dari and Pashto. Care was taken to ensure that interviewers for each respondent remained constant, for the sake of continuity and to build trust and rapport. However, the teams rotated internally with the interviewer and note taker exchanging roles with each different household. Feedback on transcripts was provided regularly, and analytical discussions with the field teams were held at the end of each working day in the field, facilitated by the author.

*Debriefing:* Debriefing sessions were held in between field missions and at the end of data collection for each study site. The project team contributed to joint analysis on emerging themes based on the collected information and observations. Some of the sessions involved clarification of key issues for particular households, while others involved systematic household comparisons in relation to key themes. Discussions were held regarding the meanings of particular local terms and the way in which ideas were articulated by respondents.

Issues of translation and interpretation were continually considered in analysing the transcripts, which were produced from verbatim notes, particularly in the case of interviews which utilised an interpreter. Though the combined skills of the research project staff were strong, it was inevitable that some information was lost, both in

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10 These included: household composition and structure, household history, home and services, land and agricultural production, income-generating work, credit and saving, links with the state/government and informal systems, and wider context.

the note-taking, translation and transcribing stages and in the interpretation in terms of nuance, emphasis and tone. Attempts were made by the project staff to minimise such information loss by having a note-taker transcribe the interview jointly with the interviewer, and by reviewing and approving notes and transcripts as soon as reasonably possible after the conclusion of an interview.

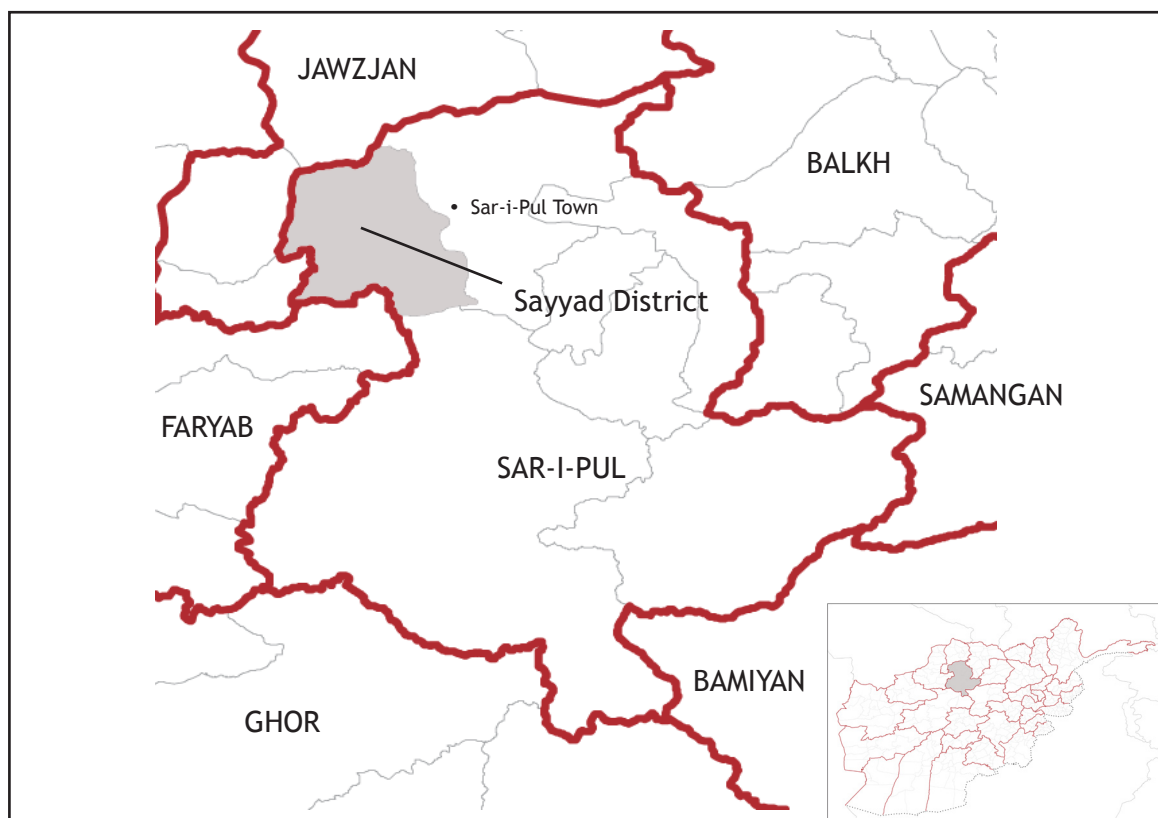
### 3. Sar-i-Pul Province and the Study Villages

#### 3.1 Introduction

Sar-i-Pul Province, occupying a topographical gradient between the central highlands and northern Turkmen plains, is by all accounts one of the poorest in Afghanistan. Performing consistently poorly in a variety of development indicators including health, water access, sanitation, and education, it ranked 31<sup>st</sup> out of 34 provinces in a recent index of well-being.<sup>11</sup> This section will outline some of the natural, political and historical characteristics of the province which have shaped the lives and livelihoods of its residents.

Bordered by Ghor and Bamiyan provinces to the south, Faryab, Jawzjan and Balkh to the west and north, and Samangan to the east, Sar-i-Pul is a largely mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain, with a high proportion of the population (93%) estimated to live in rural zones.<sup>12</sup> The northern areas of the province, characterised by hills and plains, support the bulk of the province's estimated 450,000 to 505,000 people.<sup>13</sup> Rain-fed agriculture and livestock-rearing, often in combination with non-farm labour, are the mainstay of their rural livelihoods. As Table 1 shows, agriculture and non-farm labour are more significant components of livelihoods in Sar-i-Pul in comparison with neighbouring provinces in a similar agro-ecological zone.

*Figure 1. Location of Sayyad District*



11 Central Statistics Organisation and the United Nations Population Fund, *A Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile: Household Listing 2003-05* (Kabul: CSO and UNFPA, 2007).

12 CSO and UNFPA, *A Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile*.

13 CSO and UNFPA, *A Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile*.



While a more diverse mixture of horticulture, small-scale forestry and fruit cultivation (namely grapes, melon and watermelon) is common in specific lowland and river-irrigated areas to the north, subsistence wheat farming is the predominant agricultural base of livelihoods across the whole province. In the more remote and mountainous southern areas, including Kohistanat and Balkhab, access to urban markets for labour is more difficult and larger-scale livestock rearing and trading are typically more central to livelihoods.

Water access is a major issue in Sar-i-Pul, where the rural population has some of the lowest rates of access to safe drinking water (12%) and to irrigated land in the country (less than 20%).<sup>14</sup> Supply constraints are further compounded by issues of distribution inequity between communities,<sup>15</sup> making the province highly vulnerable to drought-induced crop failure and household food shortages. According to the 2007/8 NRVA, 57% of the Sar-i-Pul sample households reported experiencing livelihood shock related to water shortages, which although similar to neighbouring provinces, is nevertheless a very high comparative figure nationally. In addition, Sar-i-Pul exhibits high levels of food insecurity according to various surveillance systems, including USAID's Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWS NET)<sup>16</sup> and the World Food Programme (WFP)'s Vulnerability Assessment Mapping (VAM) system.<sup>17</sup> The "borderline food insecure" category defines almost half of the population in Sar-i-Pul, compared to 23% national average, and 25% and 31% in bordering Faryab and Jawzjan.<sup>18</sup>

Given its geography and problematic water accessibility in combination with a number of external livelihood shocks (including apparently more frequent droughts and cold winters), Sar-i-Pul has seen a long-term decline in agricultural productivity. The province was formerly well known as a producer of dried fruits and walnuts as well as a significant exporter of *karakul* skins and *gillims* (a type of carpet). Anecdotal evidence also indicates that it had also been a surplus cereal-producing province until approximately thirty years ago.<sup>19</sup> Livestock herds and the trade of their derivative products have also experienced significant decline, with the severe winter and drought of 1971, subsequent conflict and displacement during the 1980s and 1990s, and further periods of drought in 1999-2002 and 2006-2008—meaning that livestock have recovered neither in number nor in their relative contribution to livelihoods in the area.

Despite the centrality of rain-fed agriculture to livelihoods in Sar-i-Pul, the latest 2007/8 NRVA indicates that access to land among rural households in the province—either through ownership, renting or sharecropping—is low, at 31% versus 55% nationally, the third lowest in the country. While few households in the study were found to be self-sufficient in wheat in most years, cash crops such as sesame and melons are important for making up for grain harvest shortfalls. Given the many risks involved in rain-fed agriculture and the fact that settlements in rural Sar-i-Pul are typically much larger than most rural areas in the north, particularly in Sayyad District,<sup>20</sup> it is unsurprising that non-farm livelihood activities are also well established. "Good" agricultural years that absorb all local supply

14 Central Statistics Organisation and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, *National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2007/8* (Kabul: CSO and MRRD, 2009).

15 Adam Pain, "Understanding Village Institutions: Case Studies on Water Management from Faryab and Sar-i-Pul" (Kabul: AREU, 2004).

16 For more information, see [www.fews.net](http://www.fews.net).

17 For more information, see [vam.wfp.org](http://vam.wfp.org).

18 Central Statistics Organisation and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, *National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2005* (Kabul: CSO and MRRD, 2007).

19 Confirmed in conversations with various study respondents and key informant interviews.

20 According to the CSO/UNFPA profile, 45% of settlements have over 500 inhabitants, the highest in the province.

of labour occur approximately every 6-7 years, leading to long-standing patterns of seasonal migration to more successful agricultural areas (e.g. Kunduz, Baghlan), brick factories in Balkh, and to Iran and Pakistan to cope not just with the potential impact of failed harvest, but also with the highly seasonal income of small-holder farming, which hardly meets most households' consumption needs year-round.

**Table 1. Sources of income (%): Sar-i-Pul compared to neighbouring provinces**

Province	Agriculture	Livestock	Opium	Trade	Manufacture	Non-farm labour	Remittance	Other
Sar-i-Pul	75	21	1	13	6	45	4	3
Faryab	53	27	3	25	15	31	6	4
Jawzjan	48	18	1	37	25	37	1	3
Samangan	36	15	1	17	8	28	3	9
National	47	23	4	27	5	33	5	6

Source: *National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2005*.

Note: Row totals exceed 100% as respondents selected multiple income sources, depending to some degree on seasons and markets.

In addition to economic marginality, the political history of Sar-i-Pul somewhat explains its present day isolation from central government and international aid. Formerly part of "Mazar-i-Sharif" (present-day Balkh) and then Jawzjan provinces, which both share an ethnic Uzbek, Sar-i-Pul became a distinct provincial entity relatively recently, in 1988, reflecting its historical position as peripheral to the larger economies of Mazar-i-Sharif and Sheberghan. Pockets of Pashtuns, Tajiks, Arabs and Hazaras are also present, with the majority of the latter dominating the southern highland districts of Kohistanat and Balkhab. During the Taraki government (April 1978–September 1979), various mujahiddin groups formed to oppose the communist government forces in open combat. The factions were aligned partly along ethnicity; for example *Hizb-i-Islami* (Hazara), *Jamiat-i-Islami* (Uzbek) and *Hizb-i-Wahdat* (Hazara, 1988 onwards) were the dominant parties in Kohistanat, Sangcharak and Sayyad, and Balkhab, respectively. Vestiges of power gained by particular commanders and individuals remain in Sar-i-Pul, as elsewhere in Afghanistan. The conflict at various stages of intensity caused massive internal displacement, particularly from settlements in the northern half of the province, in the early to mid-1980s.

Once referred to as "the forgotten province" by UNAMA,<sup>21</sup> Sar-i-Pul receives some of the least international assistance and central government funding of any province, at \$53 per head, above only Ghor and Wardak.<sup>22</sup> This is likely a reflection of its comparatively low political and economic importance in the region, its opium "poppy-free" status since 2008, and the relative absence, until recently, of insecurity. The capacity of the provincial government to deliver effective services has been slow to develop.<sup>23</sup> A number of development actors in the area, as well as the majority of study respondents, perceive a deeply entrenched corruption in Sar-i-Pul's local governance system. This was demonstrated by a number of high-profile rape cases in recent years, in which the accused evaded prosecution with apparent ease.<sup>24</sup> Respondents at initial stages of this project emphasised a feeling of disconnectedness from, and an inability to access, elected political representatives,<sup>25</sup> a sentiment they reiterated throughout the course

21 Marguerite Roy, quoted in Katarina Larsson, "A Provincial Survey of Balkh, Jowzjan, Samangan and Saripul" (Stockholm?: SIDA, 2008).

22 Matt Waldman, "Falling Short: Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan," ACBAR Advocacy Series (Kabul: ACBAR, 2008).

23 United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), pers. comm.

24 Key Informant Interview, international NGO, Sar-i-Pul Town.

25 Adam Pain, "Sar-i-Pul and Sayyad District Context," based on exploratory research in March 2008



of the research. Aid delivery was also perceived to be a corrupt process by villagers and locally-based international actors alike, further undermining the legitimacy of the local government.

In 2006, approximately seven operating NGOs were identified,<sup>26</sup> a figure which does not appear to have changed significantly. However, a UNAMA provincial office opened in May 2009, making agricultural reform one of its priorities. According to a statement made by former UN Special Representative Kai Eide at the inauguration, the office would serve “one of [UNAMA’s] most important objectives to draw more attention and resources to the poorest provinces,” in order to mitigate potential deteriorations in security.<sup>27</sup>

While improvements in physical and service infrastructure have been made throughout the years, enabling unprecedented levels of access to health, education and urban markets, the latest available figures are still not encouraging. For example, male adult literacy in Sar-i-Pul is 17%, much lower than neighbouring Faryab and Jawzjan provinces (28% and 26%, respectively).<sup>28</sup> It is within this context of isolation, under-development and marginal increase in donor attention that poverty in Sar-i-Pul has persisted.

### 3.2 Sayyad District

Sayyad District lies to the southwest of Sar-i-Pul Town, bordered to the north and east by Sheberghan, Qushtepa and Darzab districts of Jawzjan and by the mountainous Kohistanat District to the south. Its population is predominantly Uzbek, with a few communities of Pashtuns, Tajiks and Arabs.<sup>29</sup>

Sayyad is considered one of the poorer districts of Sar-i-Pul. It has a very pronounced water shortage issue, particularly in the downstream villages whose economy depends to a great extent on rain-fed agriculture and seasonal migration.<sup>30</sup> Given the marginality of its water supply, Sayyad has been more severely impacted by drought over the last decades compared to districts at higher elevation, and therefore witnessed a starker decline in livestock numbers, in absolute and relative terms, than much of the rest of Sar-i-Pul. The production and trade of *karakul*, milk, yoghurt, rugs and other wool-based commodities have therefore also greatly reduced. Sayyad is a major area for the cultivation of melon and watermelon, which are sold in nearby Sar-i-Pul Town, and now to a lesser degree, for sesame. The preliminary 2007-8 NRVA findings calculated the proportion of food-secure residents at just 15%, above only Sozmaqala District (14%), indicating generalised vulnerability to periodic and sometimes acute food shortages.

Sayyad was designated as a district in 1992. Though this has brought in new political functionaries, including a district governor bureaucracy and some additional resources, the district does not seem to have gained political influence with the central government. Throughout the course of the research, residents cited many examples implying that Sayyad representatives must routinely bypass the provincial government to petition at higher levels for their rightful allocation of aid and resources, with often limited success. Of great significance to many people in Sayyad is their lack of political representation on a national level, which they feel disadvantages them in terms of government spending

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(unpublished).

26 UNAMA, cited in Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, *Sar-e Pul Provincial Profile* (Kabul: MRRD, 2006).

27 UN News Centre, “UN expands presence in Afghanistan with new office in the north,” 9 May 2009, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=30752&Cr=Afghani&Cr1>.

28 CSO and MRRD, *National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2005*.

29 Waldman, “Falling Short: Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan.”

30 Pain, “Understanding Village Institutions: Case Studies on Water Management from Faryab and Sar-i-Pul.”

and investment.<sup>31</sup> Sar-i-Pul has five representatives on the *Wolesi Jirga* (lower house of parliament), and while two of them are from one predominantly Hazara district, none are from Sayyad.

Sayyad experienced intense fighting during the Soviet-Afghan War, reaching its peak in 1983 and 1984 when a prominent local commander, Suraj Khan of the *Jamiat* faction, fought government forces. Significant internal displacement took place as people sought refuge further up the Sarchasma River Valley in the Kohistanat District, in many cases for years. Suraj Khan was reported to have defected to the government and then to the Taliban, and was killed by *Jamiat* forces 15 years later. A further, shorter period of displacement to Kohistanat was common for many, particularly from Uzbek settlements, toward the end of the Taliban regime when armed conflict returned to the area. During these times of upheaval, longer-term migration to Pakistan and Iran occurred to varying degrees from different villages, with the majority returning via a UNHCR-assisted repatriation scheme in 2002 and 2003. Issues related to reclaiming and reasserting land entitlements were common for returnees around this time, though many are now resolved through informal and traditional dispute resolution mechanisms.

Many villages in Sayyad District were reportedly involved sporadically and for relatively short periods in opium poppy cultivation, though the largely popular current *woliswal*, Mullah Abdul Latif, is widely credited with dissuading the district population from growing it on religious grounds. Although the district is now officially “poppy-free,” evidence on the ground suggests continuing cultivation in certain parts.<sup>32</sup> The failure of the central government to deliver aid promised to reward the full eradication of the crop was a major source of local dissatisfaction at the time of research.

Insecurity has become a growing problem in Sayyad District. While the relatively low-level threats to security in Sar-i-Pul Province often relate to criminal activities and drugs and arms trafficking through the northern districts, insurgent and anti-government elements have a growing presence in Sayyad. In 2007, an expatriate engineer from the NGO German Agro Action (GAA) was captured and killed, leading to disruptions in aid delivery as GAA, an NSP facilitator, withdrew from the area. Another NGO, ZOA Refugee Care, took over the facilitator role, implementing NSP projects mainly related to drinking water facilities, electricity, mills and irrigation infrastructure.<sup>33</sup> As the table below shows, Sayyad has established a reasonable number of CDC *shuras* under the NSP programme, but to date has not managed to execute as many development projects compared to other districts. Given Sayyad’s preferential location in terms of proximity to Sar-i-Pul Town, it is somewhat surprising that the number of development projects implemented per person is only slightly above that of much more inaccessible districts like Balkhab.

Security in Sayyad District declined markedly in 2009. In the spring, a major joint Afghan National Police (ANP) and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) offensive was launched against insurgents in Al Malek Village, in southern Sayyad, following an insurgent group’s growing influence and encroachment toward Sar-i-Pul Town with tactics such as threatening and extorting residents, and burning a girls’ school.<sup>34</sup> The group had been successful in recruiting locally and reportedly grew significantly over

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31 See Noah Coburn and Anna Larson, “Patronage, Posturing, Duty, Demographics: Why Afghans Voted in 2009” (Kabul: AREU, 2009) for a discussion on the importance *ashnai* (familiarity) in political representation.

32 Key informant interview, Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), Sar-i-Pul.

33 ZOA Refugee Care NSP project documentation.

34 ZOA Refugee Care, pers. comm., 16 April 2009.

the summer of 2009,<sup>35</sup> causing some NGOs to temporarily suspend operations. Though reported incidents decreased in the subsequent months,<sup>36</sup> Sayyad District Centre was reported to have come under direct attack from armed insurgents for the first time in March 2010. It seems likely that given the instability of neighbouring Darzab and Qushtapa districts in Jawzjan and the dramatic increase in Taliban and other anti-government group infiltration into other areas of the north, Sayyad residents will have to negotiate an increasingly complex environment of conflicting powerholders in order to secure their livelihoods and personal safety.

**Table 2. NSP project implementation in Sar-i-Pul by district**

District	Population*	CDC shuras	Projects implemented	CDCs per 1,000 popn	Projects per 1,000 pop
Sar-i-Pul	115,000	113	393	0.98	3.42
Sangcharak	88,000	67	249	0.76	2.83
Kohistanat	72,000	70	219	0.97	3.04
Sayyad	47,000	48	127	1.02	2.70
Balkhab	44,000	72	91	1.64	2.07
Gosfandi	39,000	19	219	0.49	5.62
Sosmaqala	36,000	11	83	0.31	2.31

Source: National Solidarity Programme (NSP), per population figures calculated by author. \* Estimates based on the *NRVA 2005*, rounded to the nearest 1,000.

The geographical, environmental and political features of Sayyad District underline a context of vulnerability derived principally from susceptibility to drought, owing to poor water supply and low levels of irrigated land. A strong *woliswal* and some signs of infrastructural and basic services development in the district are positive elements shaping livelihoods in Sayyad District, despite worsening security, relatively little government and aid attention, and the challenges of livelihood recovery following a severe drought.

### 3.3 The three study villages

The three research sites lie along the Sarchashma River Valley, ranging from the foothills of the mountains to the south to the river's flood plain, before it reaches Sar-i-Pul Town.

#### **Village A**

Village A is situated around 30 km from Sar-i-Pul Town, around two kilometres further up the valley from the district centre, which is Village B. It is home to around 180 households from the Uzbek ethnic group.

It is the poorest and least developed of the three villages. Livelihoods in the village traditionally relied on a mixture of livestock rearing and small-holder wheat and watermelon production. The majority of the households are poor, with a few wealthier households growing poplar trees and one or two other crops such as barley, sesame and *zagher*.<sup>37</sup> Land-holding size does not vary greatly between wealth groups, the average among the original 20-household sample being around 10-15 *jeribs* of rain-fed land often located some way outside the village. Although there is a natural spring, it is located in the lower section of the settlement, meaning very little land is irrigated. The 2006-8 drought dramatically reduced livestock numbers, leaving the majority of poor households

35 Key informant interview, PRT, Sar-i-Pul.

36 United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS), pers. comm., 01 December 2009.

37 Crop-yielding seed, used to make oil.

with no livestock, and the wealthier households with severely diminished herds. This loss has had far-reaching effects, including loss of animal-derived food products, hides and wool for *gillim* and hat-making, as well as dung for heating and cooking. After selling livestock assets, many households had very little to buffer themselves from the continuing drought, leading to acute food shortages and widespread hunger—reaching a peak in the spring and summer of 2008.

Seasonal migration of young men to the brickfields of Mazar-i-Sharif has been commonplace in the village since 2001. The labour market saturation and depressed wage rate during the recent drought, combined with record high food prices, led to large-scale migration of men to Iran. In fact, only 4 of the 17 households from the original study with surplus male labour did not have at least one family member in Iran. The three remaining households had relocated to Sar-i-Pul, Kohistanat and Pakistan.

Intense fighting during the Afghan-Soviet War led the great majority of villagers to become internally displaced in Kohistanat. In contrast to Village B, however, migration abroad was not as commonplace. Even during the Taliban period (September 1996-December 2001), Household A06 and others stated clearly that although house searches took place, the majority did not have cause to leave since there was no conflict. Attitudes are perceptibly more inward-looking and social norms rather more conservative than Villages B and C, in part due to its isolation but perhaps also because of the settlement's marginal economic and political position.

Due to its proximity to the district centre, Village A's history has been overshadowed and shaped by its more influential neighbour, Village B. Villagers use the clinic and boys' school located there, expressing feelings of discrimination in their access to these services. Resentment is often expressed at the perceived capture of aid and development projects by Village B, which administers such assistance within the district. There is also a perceived characterisation of villagers there as being more shrewd, influential and non-traditional. The elected head of the CDC *shura* was a former commander for warlord Suraj Khan, from Village B, reflecting the modern, dependent relationship between the two settlements in terms of aid allocation and service provision. Aid in Village A has been limited to regular public work schemes on road resurfacing through the WFP, and in the construction of a mosque, for which labour was partly paid for by ZOA Refugee Care. The *shura* has spent its allocated funds on digging wells and installing a generator, though it remains dormant as the villagers have not raised funds to fuel it.

### ***Village A study households***

The two wealth group I<sup>38</sup> households in Village A hold very different sources of wealth and influence. Household A02 is the head of *shura*, has three wives, and built his position in the community as a pro-government sub-commander during the mujahiddin period (1992-1996). Like other longer-term army conscripts, the head of Household A02 was paid well at the time, enabling him to purchase large amounts of land and livestock (see Annex 1). With relatively good external connections within a socially and economically isolated village, Household A02's head is unchallenged in his leadership of the village. Due to this history, the household maintains a number of patronage relationships, for example with the widow of Household A06, whose husband was sent to battle by the then-commander. The household is sustained by farming, sharecropping out its own land, sharecropping in additional land to grow cash crops such as melon, and by running

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38 This study uses the wealth groups that were defined in a participatory manner in focus group discussions held during the original study in 2002-3. Wealth group I typically refers to those with the most material and social wealth, and at the other end of the scale, wealth group III with the least. In one or two instances, households have been redefined by the author in the present study where it was discovered through the initial round of interviews that households had been classified inaccurately.

the village shop, managed by one of the sons. While the shop does not earn significant profit, it serves an important community function and the household is able to recall many simultaneous debts from shop credit at any time. Prior to becoming head of the local *shura*, the household head was a successful *jallab* (livestock trader) and owned a shop in Sar-i-Pul Town, acquired during the mujahiddin period in a lottery system, which he then rented out. After selling the property in 2006 for 70,000 Afs in order to marry off a son, the household has suffered to some degree as agriculture became more central to its economy. Nevertheless, they were able to purchase land worth 70,000 Afs in the last five years. One of the household's three wives and one son live in Mazar-i-Sharif.

Though born to a wealthy family, the head of Household A01 lost much of his inheritance through family mismanagement during his early adulthood. Through money saved from a three-year military service and extensive borrowing, he was able to recover some of the lands sold (around 10%) and pursue a reinvestment strategy with the labour of his three sons, gradually accumulating livestock through *jallabi* (livestock trading) and farm sales. The household's livelihood trajectory has therefore seen a gradual long-term improvement since the sudden asset loss. The household, which sold many livestock to weather the drought, remains one of the wealthiest in the village despite its sharp misfortunes. By embarking on the *haj*, sending his son to become a mullah and through public acts of kindness or hospitality (such as paying the funeral cost of an unknown war victim, and employing many farm labourers during the Taliban period), the household head has consolidated his position in the community. His influence, however, while significant in terms of his role as an elder and benefactor, lies outside the structure of the CDC *shura* and the formal decision-making processes of the village.

Wealth group II households, A03 and A04 share similarities with those of wealth group I. As a son of a wealthy landowning father, Household A03's head was also a local commander, and as such maintains beneficial external relationships to this day. The household was one of the few in Village A to benefit from poppy cultivation, earning around 160,000 Afs over the Taliban period, though the drought and the division of land among brothers have caused a more recent decline in its economy, as the household shrunk to five members. After inherited land division in 2002 and the breaking up of the joint family in 2003, Household A03 has not achieved similar profits from farming as in the past, though it only experienced harvest shortfalls since 2006. The household head traded his livestock for land, which is sharecropped out, and migrated to Iran in 2005, as an accumulation rather than coping strategy. After being deported in 2007, he returned to obtain a relatively well-paid job with skills acquired from Iran, enabling regular remittances to the strong family network left behind.

The head of Household A04 is the only literate household head among the eight interviewed. Due primarily to this, as well as a good inter-generational social standing, the head of Household A04 was selected as the CDC *shura* administrator. Through certain dividends, such as one additional household entitlement to external aid, the household may have a more regular source of income than farming alone, though income from the household head's trade as a carpenter has dried up due to the drought. The illness and ultimate death of the oldest daughter in 2006 led the household into very large debt (up to 65,000 Afs), constituting a major barrier to post-drought recovery. The decision to encourage sons to diversify their skills through apprenticeships with skilled tradesmen in Sar-i-Pul has yet to pay off. The household sent two sons to labour in Mazar-i-Sharif and another to Iran via smugglers to repay the household's large debts.

All four wealth group III households in the interview sample, and indeed others in the original 20-household sample, were landless or owned small amounts of low-quality land, often further from the village and which they lacked the means to cultivate. Household A05 is made up of an elderly couple, their two sons and young grandchildren. Poor and



landless from the past, the house itself is owned by the wife. The household gets by on irregular remittance from a married son in Iran, and the joint wage labouring efforts of the other son and elderly head, and marginal economic activities such as collecting and selling firewood. One daughter married into Household A02, while the other obtained a divorce from an abusive and neglectful marriage to an older man, driving the household 120,000 Afs into debt from bribes and fees to various government entities. This crippling debt combined with a low income means that the household struggles at times to meet its daily requirements.

Household A07 is comprised of a landless couple, occupying a home that is rent-free on charitable terms. With no sons, and many young dependent daughters, this family has struggled over a much longer term, lacking the male labour necessary to sharecrop in, migrate or otherwise diversify income. With farm labour opportunities for the household head reduced, “selling” their daughters into marriage at intervals has become crucial to household survival, as it depends almost wholly on the bride price revenue. The household appears to have exhausted their sources of credit locally, and therefore resorts to less favourable means to access cash when bride price payments are delayed, such as selling borrowed livestock at a loss. Although the wife performs the role of a party planner in the village, the household does not seem to currently benefit from a strong social safety net, perhaps due to defaulting many times on previous loans.

Household A08 is effectively landless, with a small parcel of land of low quality located far from the village. Wage labouring of the household head, bonded and contracted labour of two sons both inside and outside the village, and the sale of collected firewood are the pillars of the household economy. However, even with these multiple sources of income, the family reported severe financial stress as bonded and wage labour opportunities dried up. At the time of interview, they were considering abandoning the village for the city, despite the risk of losing their home and assets.

Finally, female-headed Household A06 achieves a degree of security over others in the same wealth group for a number of reasons. Widowed a decade ago when her eldest child was 10 years old, the household now benefits from a greater availability of male labour than in the past, now earning four sons’ incomes from labouring in Iran and Mazar-i-Sharif and shepherding within the village. Through a number of patronage relations including, as mentioned, Household A02, A06 has also been successful in accessing state benefits for widows as well as numerous other forms of help. The head of household herself originates from Village B, where she maintains a number of favourable connections, such as with the doctor whom she consults without charge, as well as extended family with whom her youngest son currently lives. It is through this combination of male labour availability, social connections and non-land based livelihood that the household has evaded many of the severe drought impacts experienced by other villagers.

### **Village B**

Village B is home to around 1,200 predominantly Uzbek households, divided into neighbourhoods defined by five mosques. It is the location of the *woliswali*, the district police station, a boys’ and a girls’ school, a veterinary clinic and numerous shops. The village benefits from greater areas of both rain-fed and irrigated land, though suffers the same general water access issues as Villages A, resulting from breached sharing agreements by upstream villages during the crucial spring, summer and early autumn planting months. The spring located in the lower reaches of Village A, however, provides Village B with a higher volume of stream water.

While seed to harvest ratios are similar across the three villages, at around 1:5 in a normal year and 1:10 in a good year, Village B appears to have experienced more

“better” years since 2002-3, owing to better water distribution infrastructure and perhaps land quality. Agricultural decline in this village was therefore pronounced in the last two years, as opposed to three years in Village A. With average land holdings exceeding that of Village A as well as better access to water, a more diverse range of crops is typically grown. Wheat and watermelons are cultivated in alternate years, as well as often maize, sesame, *jaroo*,<sup>39</sup> *zagher* and onions in years with better rainfall. Livestock is less central to livelihoods here, and animals are commonly kept outside and away from the cultivated land around the village (e.g. Kohistanat), by boys and young men working as shepherds. From the late Taliban period until 2002-3, poppy was also widely grown. *Gillim*, hat and *shal*<sup>40</sup> weaving were common income-generating activities prior to the drought. Owing to its status as a district centre or *woliswali*, Village B now receives greater government funding per head<sup>41</sup> and improved access to compensated labour on mass public work schemes (such as Food-for-Work). The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) also distributes seeds and fertilisers to a limited number of farmers every year in the village, according to respondents, and salaried work with the police and private companies is greater than in the other two study sites. NGO assistance is apparently greater than in other villages, with two or three courses for women having been implemented in the last few years, including literacy and tailoring classes, compensated with food aid.

Village B suffered the most intense fighting and damage during the Afghan-Soviet War. The majority of villagers, 884 families,<sup>42</sup> after a short spell of displacement in Kohistanat, migrated jointly to Pakistan where many spent over a decade as refugees. Many years of working together as migratory labourers in Pakistan’s brickfields has fostered strong social cohesion, especially under the strategic leadership of the present-day community leader and head of *shura* who encouraged more successful group action. Examples include a successfully administered electrical supply through a NSP-funded, community-managed generator, and communal water pumps maintained jointly by residents. The village has also successfully petitioned for and built a girls’ school, using land donated by a wealthy resident<sup>43</sup> and local labour.

The distinctive nature of this joint refugee experience has shaped many aspects of local livelihood change and development. Most significantly, it has established patterns of seasonal migration to the same brick-making regions of Pakistan, and entitled the majority of villagers to voluntary repatriation assistance, which appears to have been instrumental in livelihood recovery in the early years after return, which were also favourable agriculture years. A number of respondents mentioned bringing home savings accrued in Pakistan at the time too, contributing to the successful livelihood recovery widely reported. However, many families, encountering significant asset loss through conflict-related damage and land ownership disputes on return, subsequently returned to Pakistan—a process accelerated by the recent drought. Though only one of the 20-household sample could not be located, two respondents estimated the number of households to have moved back to Pakistan as 300 and 500, respectively.

### ***Village B study households***

Household B01 in Village B represents wealth group I, sharing similarities with others from the original sample, particularly in education. Many of the village elite, including

39 Type of shrub used to make a traditional broom; *jaroo* also refers to the name of the broom itself.

40 A woven pattern textile made from wool, used as a basis for various crafts.

41 Head of *shura*, focus group discussion, 19 November 2008.

42 Head of *shura*, interview, 22 February 2009.

43 Key informant interview, Village B.

the local doctor, were among the first to have attended high school in Sar-i-Pul Town, around 30 years ago. The household head is a longstanding community leader and the current head of the *shura*. He led the majority of residents to Pakistan during conflict he has been their representative since then. He is a well-liked and influential leader. Though not the wealthiest individual in the village, many in his large household benefit directly from work opportunities coming to the village, as well as large land assets. It is through these diverse salaries, including those of the head's mother, and very large land assets farmed by his brother, that the household experienced a later onset of decline during the recent drought (see Annex 2).

In a similar way, the head of wealth group II Household B04 holds a prominent position in the community as the village school teacher, and his father was an important religious figure throughout the time of displacement in Pakistan. Rather like Household A04, the literacy and social standing of the household combined with friendships with village power holders and a salary offers some security, though its economic situation has nevertheless declined due to drought and labour shortage.

Another wealth group II household, B03, is a very successful farming family with large land holdings, whose head is responsible for distributing aid in his neighbourhood, on account of his literacy and the fact that his uncle previously performed the role. Stocks and savings buffered the household against a decline in welfare in the short term, though the centrality of farming to the household economy implied sharp reductions in income with the onset of the drought. The third wealth group II household, B02, experienced the most pronounced decline. Formerly a *bai* (wealthy individual) with many connections, the head lacks the local political influence to benefit from such relationships in the climate of widespread economic depression, as his wealthy reputation acts against him in terms of aid allocation and credit access. Multiple adverse events have driven the household's decline, including the loss of land in a dispute, and various severe health shocks, including the injury and disablement of his son by a landmine, sustained while working with his brother in Zabul Province. This particular event has been a major blow to the household's present financial security and future earning power, as well as general well-being.

Rather like B02, the situation of Household B05 has worsened markedly from a relatively strong starting point. This household does not report having experienced any significant idiosyncratic livelihood shocks such as serious illness. It has generally weathered difficult periods with apparent ease, even buying land cheap in the acute food crisis of the "Bangladesh Year" (1970). However, with harvests down, savings spent and livestock sold, the household's 17 members are relying more on women's income and migration. The household's pre-drought income had been derived largely from farming and livestock rearing, and this lack of diversity was a significant factor behind the strong drought impacts they experienced. The household head is against international migration on the grounds of its detrimental impacts on family life, and therefore his sons labour in Mazar-i-Sharif to compensate for income loss.

Household B06, headed by a disabled cobbler and builder, possesses the most land and male labour of the three wealth group III households. Though the ability to earn a living through farming, cobbling and construction work has diminished in the drought, a split family migration strategy has reduced the economic burden for those who remain. In addition, the head demonstrated strategic relationship-building through various points in time which enabled them to endure both physical and economic insecurity.

Household B08 has been headed by a widow since 2004 who supports six members (including a disabled son and daughter-in-law) through her paid domestic work in Sar-i-Pul Town. She also benefits from sympathetic concessions of powerful individuals like



A06. Through various connections of her own and of her daughter-in-law, the household is able to borrow extensively whenever necessary to overcome difficulties. In addition, the disabled daughter-in-law was selected to teach on a literacy course, bringing in considerable relative income. This income, nevertheless, is not sustainable in the longer run. With fewer labourers and labour capacity compared to A06, Household B08, although currently coping, is in a rather more fragile position. Sharecropping out of land provides limited food self-sufficiency even in a good year, and the household therefore continues to depend on work provided by extended family in Sar-i-Pul.

Lastly, Household B07 is an interesting example of how political and economic conditions shape livelihood fortunes over a longer period. Growing up as an orphan in bonded labour, the head was able to gradually climb out of poverty and acquire land and property with careful and strategic investment. Compared to households B01, B02 and others who prospered from military service and farming over the same period, Household B07 was able to build assets gradually through the secure income from bonded labour as well as through better farm labouring opportunities reported at the time. The household merged with that of the household head's brother upon return from Pakistan in 2002, due to lack of male labour within the family; however, expenses between the two units remain separate. The household sharecrops out their land as they no longer own oxen, and sharecrop in instead, therefore earning less from the land than pre-drought times. Now vulnerable to the same market forces and environmental fortunes that supported their initial prospering, the household, having no sons, has resorted to the marriage of daughters and land sales to survive.

### **Village C**

Village C is a newer settlement founded 90 years ago, with a population of around 1,100 households comprising of two distinct groups—a larger Arab and a smaller Pashtun community, administered by separate *shuras*. The village is located on the flood plains of the Sarchashma River, around 5 km from Sar-i-Pul Town. The majority of the agricultural land within the village reportedly belongs to residents of Sar-i-Pul Town,<sup>44</sup> meaning generally much lower levels of land ownership than in Villages A and B.

According to local oral history, the original Pashtun settlers in the area were relocated to the area from Farah Province by government policy in 1920. The large areas of unowned “desert” land were gradually bought up by Arab in-migrants, who originally worked as shepherds for the established population.<sup>45</sup> Land holdings in Village C are relatively large but unequally distributed, with a significant proportion of the villagers owning no land. As such, income for many depend to a greater degree on the labour market of nearby Sar-i-Pul Town and seasonal rural-to-rural migration (for livestock rearing and farm labouring), as well as sharecropping, bonded labour and shepherding. The poorest of the village population struggles to sustain itself on a daily basis, with numerous households in the original 20-household sample reporting begging in the town to be an important income source. A similar range of crops is grown in Village C as in Village A, but with indications that large amounts of cumin have been produced and sold in the past. Land in Village C is not irrigated in the traditional sense, but rather by *gandas* (flood water storage pools). With a water table around 40 metres deep, the village has severe domestic water access problems, exacerbated by a growth in population in part due to refugee return. Also distinctive is the raising of camels and horses and the wider range of craft made, and sometimes sold, by women themselves.

While community cohesion, as evidenced by accounts of mutual trust and reciprocity,

<sup>44</sup> Key informant interview, Village B.

<sup>45</sup> Key informant interview, Pashtun elder.

is not as strong in Village C as in Village B, the symbiosis of the Arab and Pashtun communities has positively shaped the experiences of the village through periods of conflict. Alternately in the mujahiddin and Taliban eras, the two communities were able to extend a level of protection toward the other in the context of ethnically-targeted violence. However, great damage was nonetheless sustained by the village during the most intense fighting, with villagers being displaced as much to Iran and Pakistan as Kohistanat. Again, present-day seasonal labour migration to Kunduz and Baghlan provinces is in part a legacy of dislocation, at least to the latter province, during the Taliban period. Urban migration too is pronounced, with individuals and families living in Kabul, Sheberghan and Mazar-i-Sharif. Formal governance institutions in the village are characterised by dysfunction and corruption. The CDC *shura* of the Pashtun village section was disbanded after the leader absconded with the *shura* funds. The other CDC *shura*, owing to the apparent disinterest of its head, is run largely for personal gain by its treasurer. Mistrust in this and other formal institutions is high. External aid to the village, like in Village A, is limited to road surface Food-for-Work programmes through the World Food Programme (WFP), and one or two drinking water facilities implemented by ZOA. One female respondent mentioned that a compensated poultry-rearing course for women had once taken place, though no more information was known.

### ***Village C study households***

Wealth group I Household C01 has many parallels to Household A01 in Village A. The head is a respected elder with a large amount of land and livestock (see Annex 3). The household ordinarily made significant profits from *jallab*, which became instantly less profitable under drought conditions; and in good years, the sale of cash crops. Poppy cultivation and illegal work in Saudi Arabia after performing the *haj* on two occasions were also elements to this household's rise in the past. Given his cultural status as a *haji* and personality, like Household A01, C01's head is somewhat resistant to the existing authority structure of the village *shura*, to the extent that he is attempting to register a new community and *shura* in the "desert" some distance away.

The four wealth group II households in Village C were of similar size and composition in 2002, have experienced drastically different outcomes over the study period. Household C02 has fared the best, managing to overcome the many forces driving livelihood decline in a way quite unique among the sample. Though experiencing a longer-term decline in agricultural productivity and asset sales related to ill health, the household head's position as the village *mirab* and now treasurer of the village *shura* has been key to their success. Freely admitting to appropriating community development funds for his own gain, the household has profited since his appointment, including during the drought years. The household's land is farmed by the head's brother, and livestock cared for by a shepherd. The household shows less risk aversion in their farming strategy than others, deciding to plant the same amount of seed every year regardless of the drought, as well as lending livestock to others, perhaps indicating the financial security provided by the household head's position.

Having spent refugee years in Iran rather than Pakistan, the head of Household C03 returned once again to Iran for economic reasons, reflecting in part the household's inability to re-establish their farming livelihood on return. Another motivation to return from Iran seems to have been the need to reassert their rights to land, appropriated by relatives during conflict. The household head's brother cultivates the household's land to sustain the remaining family members, and like Household A03, the family are cared for in lieu of remittance by local extended family. Family members from both the wife and husband's side remain in Iran, where most of the household's livelihood is made. The wife of the household lacks the skills possessed by the Arab women in other respondent

households to make *gillim*, *shal* and other handicrafts. As former head of the Pashtun section of the village, the eldest son in C03 possesses the necessary social capital to trade animals successfully, as well as access to sufficient credit when needed. C03 is the only Pashtun household among the interview sample from the village.

Household C04, comprised of a married couple and five dependent children, has displayed indications of a longer-term decline, resulting in current extreme hardship. After selling their land 10 years ago, the household turned to livestock trading, in which they lost large amounts of money, leading to significant long-term debts that they have been unable to service. With no working-age sons, the household is very much constrained in their coping options and has no remaining assets to sell. The wife's sister, elderly husband and young daughters recently joined the household after losing their home. Despite contributing occasional *gillim* sales to the household income, they generally represent an increased burden. The household now relies on the single irregular income of an ageing head and recently married off two daughters to ease their economic distress.

Though categorised in different wealth groups, Households C05 and C06 share much in common, and have experienced relatively similar trajectories. Now female-headed, both previous heads died, in 2004 and 2006, respectively, and both are now dependent on the farm and migratory labour incomes of their sons. Household C05 owns a small plot of land, while C06 does not, though both have wealthy relatives or connections in the village to access work and credit. For example, they are able to access scarce land for sharecropping or harvesting work from the head of the *shura* and treasurer of the *shura*, respectively. The head of Household C05 was a teacher, meaning a sharper fall in income security than C06, whose head was a farm labourer. Both female heads suffer from ill health, limiting their capacity to contribute to income-generating activities. Household C05 currently faces increased economic pressure created by many new dependents, as her daughter returned to the household with her children when her husband went to Iran. Household C06 appears to have been able to repay large debts through the wage labouring of their sons, accrued through the illness and death of the head and a failed attempt to enter Iran. While doing so, the household currently survives on alternative loans, undermining their prospects for recovery in the longer term.

Household C07, like C04, represents the struggling wage-labour-dependent section of the village with few working-age males. Moving regularly between Mazar-i-Sharif, Sar-i-Pul and Pul-i-Khumri, the household experienced multiple crises over a longer period, having to sell their home and land during the “Bangladesh Year,” and reported regularly facing food shortages. The household acquired their new home as a bride price payment, and were too poor to migrate with other villagers to Pakistan during conflict, typifying an enduring poverty faced by the landless on the margins of the informal economy. The household appears not to benefit as much as other farm labourers from good farming years, with no land and only one worker. An untreated health condition for the wife means additional reduced capacity to undertake income-generating options.

Household C08 provides an interesting case of dependent economic livelihood security. Working as a hired farmer for a family of wealthy brothers from the Pashtun section of the village, the household, while poor and landless, have access to regular work and credit based on a history of working for the aforementioned family. However, the arrangement falls short of providing economic security in the longer term. The household must repay debts to the wealthy brothers at harvest time when prices are low, and the terms of sharecropping are worse than those offered elsewhere, at just one share in six of the harvest compared to typically one in three or four in all three villages. This is because it cannot provide its own farming inputs. In bad years therefore, the arrangement fails to satisfy the needs of the household, and the head and his son were compelled to migrate to Pakistan for work numerous times over the study period.

## 4. Household Trajectories

### 4.1 Introduction

Although to varying degrees between villages and households, analysis of livelihood change across the study sample in Sayyad nonetheless points to widespread decline, asset loss and livelihood stress. At the heart of the deterioration lie multiple pre-existing structural vulnerabilities to external livelihood shocks such as the 2006-8 drought, exacerbated to various degrees by other factors and processes that are explored later in the report. This section outlines the major changes and outcomes observed over the study period, and compares how and why trajectories differed between the three villages and wealth groups.

From a weaker starting point in terms of general welfare and livelihood security, the Village A households suffered a more immediate, sustained and ultimately severe deterioration. With multiple levels of vulnerability derived largely from a dependence on small-holder rain-fed production, livestock rearing and a lack of political capital, this community possessed overall fewer options for diversification and less capacity with which to resist asset depletion and maintain a living through sustainable means. Village B, with its status as district centre, more astute political leadership and more favourable land quality, experienced a later onset of decline. Here, respondents generally reported two, rather than three or four preceding bad years, more diverse sources of income and more robust local social support mechanisms. Village C's outcomes, however, reflect the greater socioeconomic and structural inequalities within the community, as well as its stronger links to the local urban economy of Sar-i-Pul Town for those able to access them.

The three-year drought in northern Afghanistan from 2006 until 2008 had multiple, compound effects on all livelihood groups. The severity of its effects deepened as it endured, further damaging the ability of households to recover. Record-level prices of food staples, reaching a peak in spring 2008,<sup>46</sup> acted as a catalyst that led many households into a livelihoods crisis, pushing them into acute food insecurity in the summer of that year. Simultaneously, 100% crop failure was reported<sup>47</sup> in some districts, including Sayyad, forcing the majority to become dependent on markets to meet their basic needs, primarily by selling labour in order to purchase food. It is within this context that data collection took place, and in which outcomes for different livelihood activity groups within and between the villages will now be explored.

### 4.2 Farming systems

Farming directly or indirectly forms a major component of the household economy for the majority of households. Although it is only one means through which people make a living, it is central to the rural economy at large. The impacts of the drought on farming systems were numerous, and therefore central to understanding livelihood responses and alternatives.

In the face of the declining quantity and quality of harvests, poorer farming households, representing a sizable majority in Village A, reported abandoning farming early into the drought. As Household A04 reported, "This year (2008) we did not cultivate our land because we knew that we could not get any production...now you can see that most people in the village have not cultivated their land for some two or three years." Lacking the ability to afford scarce local seeds and draught power to prepare the land, many

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46 WFP Monthly Market Price Bulletin, May 2008.

47 Afghanistan Agrometeorological Monthly Bulletin (Agromet), 39, May 2008.



of these families now also lack manpower as household labour resources were diverted into other activities. In order to repay debts and meet more immediate household consumption needs, a reliance on wage labouring locally and abroad further undermines the household prospects of recommencing farming.

For those with the potential means, the risks involved in cultivating under drought conditions, described by one Village A farmer as “like gambling,” must be negotiated carefully. Household B06 commented on the strategy to split cultivation between autumn and spring seasons: “There is a saying among us *daymakar’ha* (rain-fed land farmers). It means ‘be careful, cultivate the land bit-by-bit.’” The same household, unable to accumulate seed stocks for the past five years, went to the length of selling their one ox to afford the cost of local seed last year at its peak price (250 Afs/kg) upon the arrival of good rains, in an attempt to reduce dependency on the market for food—a significant source of anxiety among many of the respondent households.

Bearing the brunt of crop failure, many of these households were unable afford measures to counter crop pests during the drought, such as protective netting for watermelon (approximately 600 Afs/net). Due to reduced capacity, those who did risk cultivation reduced not only the quantity but variety of crops planted, foregoing more profitable crops such as melon and sesame, which require more inputs. A parallel trend of reduction in land holdings, due to division between children at the time of inheritance, further increases the relative costs of farming separate land parcels, and can reduce the ability of households to achieve food self-sufficiency from their own land assets.

The ability of larger land owners to produce for the market declined significantly. In normal years, the sale of cash crops like melon and sesame enables households to accumulate savings for the lean winter months. Melons tend to increase in value over this period, being worth 500 Afs in winter compared to 100 Afs at harvest time, and as such delayed sales represent an important saving mechanism for those households able to do so such as B03. This household, while formerly earning well from cash crop sales in good years (selling 700 out of 1,500 melons harvested in 2005), reported not having produced a marketable surplus in the last three to four years. With sesame seed pressing shops having closed in all three villages due to lack of demand, households that actually succeed in producing cash crops like sesame are forced to sell their harvest raw rather than processing it to oil to gain higher returns.

In the context of the village economy, the agricultural success of larger land owners affects the economic livelihood security of the poorer households, through farm labouring, charity and systems of patronage. As landless Household C05 said, “It is true that I have no land. But the poor will have full stomachs and be content if the *qawm* is full.” Due to the covariate nature of the constraints facing landowners in drought, finding farmers willing to take on land as sharecroppers is a significant challenge, as farmers become more averse to the risk of another potentially failed or insufficient harvest. The fact that most sharecropping agreements in all three villages are for two years makes the decision to take on land for sharecropping an even more difficult one. Barriers to sharecropping from the perspective of the landowner are also significant, particularly given drought-related market price distortions. Stating that an ox costs 20,000 Afs, a neighbour of Household B08 said that in addition “they need four or five *sers* of seed to give to the farmer in order to cultivate...each *ser* costs 160 Afs. Please count. This is a lot of money, how can they find this?” These effects were most pronounced in Village C, given the imbalance of wealth and land ownership, and the already precarious economic position of many labourers. Rather, better water access and perhaps land quality in Village B meant that these risks were comparatively lower and some households, particularly the wealthier, were still engaged in sharecropping in. Inputs and lack of oxen were cited as the most significant barrier to taking on or sharecropping out land to others.

The effects of the ban on poppy cultivation on the communities at large are difficult to determine accurately due to the sensitivity of the topic. Household A02 stated that poppy cultivation in Village A was common during the Taliban, though apparently not to the extent in Village B, where a focus group respondent said

Although the government did not allow poppy growing and it was completely forbidden, people [even] grew it indoors and in walls. When we went to Pakistan people here even cultivated poppy in our empty yards!<sup>48</sup>

Household B03, who partook in large-scale poppy farming, stated that “people who cultivated poppy became *bais*,” continuing that once it was banned “[their] quality of life decreased suddenly. People faced a lot of problems...The rich people felt the change but not like the poor people. The rich people had assets, so they didn’t face the same difficulties as poor people.” This assertion corresponds with general reports that demand for farm labour was greater around 2001-4, directly benefiting many of the poorer in the villages. In Village C, some respondents spoke of widespread involvement in poppy cultivation between 1998 and 2003, with prices increasing gradually from 1,000 Afs to 6,000 Afs per *pao*<sup>49</sup> in the latter years.

Those who migrated to Pakistan or Iran during the years in which poppy was grown did not benefit, and now due to rumours of surveillance by authorities and severe punishment, as well as the persuasive influence of the *woliswal*, no instances of cultivation were heard of after 2007. Still, the impact on wealthier households was significant, particularly in combination with the drought that followed the ban, as Household A04 stated: “Since poppy cultivation was banned, we lost everything. First the government promised to help us but they didn’t.” There are mixed reports from various levels of authority<sup>50</sup> as to whether the central government actually dispersed the dividends promised for “successful” poppy eradication in Sayyad District, with implications for faith in the government for those who believe they were not.

### 4.3 Livestock

The depletion of livestock herds has had numerous knock-on effects, particularly in Villages A and C, where livelihoods revolve more around livestock and their derivatives. On a village level, as mentioned, reduced number of oxen has resulted in a significant impediment to farming activities as poorer farming households formerly accessed draught power through borrowing arrangements. According to Household A02, there were only four oxen remaining in the village at the time of interview. Likewise, the declining supply of wool has hampered women’s economic work across the wealth groups (discussed in detail in Section 4.6), while poorer households gaining some economic security through shepherding arrangements have lost these important sources of regular income as wealthier households have destocked in order to sustain the remaining herds.

All of the respondents had sold a sizable proportion, if not all, of their pre-existing stock, as indicated in the Annex. Household A02, for example, had sold over 50 sheep and goats out of 70 since the previous study as well as two horses at less than half their original value. Wealth group II Household C05 had 15 sheep at the time of interview, compared to 80 at the time of the previous study. The prohibitive cost of maintaining the herd was the main reason, as Household B04 noted: “Until my hair became white like now, I don’t remember that I bought a sack of straw for 1,200 Afs until this year.” As a domestic market linked to regional production, fodder costs soar during drought,

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48 Female respondent, focus group discussion, Village B.

49 A *pao* is unit of weight, equivalent to approximately 380 grams.

50 Key informant interviews: Provincial Officer, Sar-i-Pul, 2 June 2008; District Officer, Village B, 2 June 2008 and household interview with A04, *shura* administrator, Village A.

and may take longer to recover than imported market goods such as grain, for which market supplies are more consistent. Households in the sample from Village B, although not predominantly pastoralists, appear to have maintained slightly more of their stocks than in Villages A and C, where complete exhaustion was more widespread.

To some poorer households, the crucial function served by livestock is important even for very marginal economic activities. Elderly Household A05 head said, “If I sold my donkeys, I [would] have to go to the grave. With donkeys I can collect bushes from the mountains and carry wheat.” The weaker condition of livestock makes such tasks difficult, and slows reproduction. Welfare concerns for livestock during such times are a source of emotional stress for households, as B05 says of their goats: “Their bellies swelled and [then they] became thin little by little and then died. Whenever we looked at them, we became upset and wished to do something for them, but we could not do anything.” Protecting herds is therefore a challenge that people go to great lengths to achieve, including collecting leaves from the streets of Sar-i-Pul town, in the case of Household B07.

The liquid nature of livestock assets makes them an important buffer against the impact of shock, as well as being productive capital in of themselves. Wealthier households such as B03 could afford to sell their oxen when it became expensive to keep, and buy another one a few months later as required. The household head acknowledged an element of market risk involved; however, he sold his ox for 16,000 Afs and bought another at a higher price. For poor households, the volatile market prices are a significant impediment to accumulating livestock. The female head of Household B07 said, “We cannot afford to buy any more livestock. If the price of sheep is currently 3,000 Afs, it will have increased to 9,000 Afs by the time we wanted to buy. We cannot buy. And I do not think we can afford such a thing for another five or six years.” Price volatility does, however, enable those with the capital and acumen to make much money from *jallabi*, such as Household C01. Again, the risks involved prove unmanageable for the poor, as the eldest son of Household C05, whose father did *jallabi*, explained:

I took a 10,000 Afs loan for *jallabi* and I bought 10 livestock...but it was not a profitable business and I soon sold the livestock because I knew that if I kept the livestock longer I will lose more. I sold early to decrease [the] level of losses.

#### 4.4 “A *bai* and a poor man are now the same”

This often-heard phrase in the study villages is very telling of the extent of economic decline across the wealth groups, as well as the systems of mutual dependence that have existed among them. The head of *shura* and Household A02 affirmed, “I am at least 52 years old, and I have not seen such a bad time in my entire life. I had a good economic condition before and now I cannot even fulfil my household expenses.” In many ways, it appears that the wealthier in these communities have suffered most visibly. For example, there were very large livestock sales in households such as A01, who sold 150 from their herd of 200 sheep and goats over the drought. Households such as A02 were no longer able to employ a shepherd to care for their remaining livestock. Through the reduction in such opportunities, poor households with good links to patronage figures, such as the female-headed A06 and C05, suffered, reinforcing the popular notion that the drought impoverished all levels of the community to the same degree. However, those without the safety net of good social networks are clearly in the worst positions. The ways in which households have sought to respond to various shocks and stresses are explored in Section 5.

## 4.5 Work

Many households expressed an unsurprising preference for farming work above others due to its higher returns. As Household B05 explained, “We hardly fulfil our food needs through wage labour work, but through farming we can even make new dresses for our family members which are extra expenses.” However, the reasons go beyond profitability. For Household B02, farming is a matter of dignity: “farming is a safe and good job. No one tells you what you have to do. You are your own boss.” Where farming is not possible, farm labouring, which is usually paid in kind, is seen as preferable. According to Household C06, “[reaping is better] because I can save some wheat. It seems money goes from our hands to spend on house expenses and we cannot save it, and we have to give it to the loan provider who I am indebted to.” The day-to-day subsistence needs for this household take clear priority over other competing demands on income sources. Similarly, benefits are seen in terms of being rooted to the village, as Household C08 says:

Farm labour [has more benefits] because it allows us to survive better—because we can get straw besides wheat. Wage labouring made us live like wanderers over these last years.

With the impacts of drought on cultivation and population increases in the villages, on-farm work opportunities have diminished, with significant consequences. Household B06 summarised some of these changes:

There is a big change in farm labour in the last three years. Three years ago, if we needed farm labour we could find a person, with difficulty, who would work for 3 or 4 *sers* of wheat a day. And now these people—farm labourers—work three or four *paos* in one day due to the drought. A lot of people’s lives had deteriorated because of the drought. Now, if a person works with a *bai*, they get 3½ *sers* of wheat for a week for this work. If we cannot find work in a Mazar brickfield or other wage labour because of the drought, maybe everyone will die from hunger. We spend our life working in brick factories, and get a little money from this.

Like livestock markets, local labour markets are fluid, and wage rates respond rapidly to changes in supply and demand. With the arrival of rains in spring 2009, daily wage rates went up from 100 to 2-300 Afs, giving the labourers themselves more bargaining power in negotiating wages. The increase is relative on a longer-term scale, as daily rates reportedly reached 900 Afs during the labour intensive time of poppy cultivation under the Taliban, when labour supply was low due to refugee movements out of the country. Disparities exist on a localised level too, with farm labourers in Village C reporting compensation of 1 *ser* of wheat harvest per day compared to 3-4 in Village B, perhaps due to the proportionally greater number of labourers in Village C. Preference for *qawm* and the importance of familiarity (*shinasa*) in obtaining work may prevent Village C labourers from obtaining work in other villages where wages are higher. Rural-to-rural labour migration to provinces where seasonal demand for labour is high around urban centres has therefore been a common phenomenon in the Village C over the last few years. Men often travel seasonally between Kunduz and Pul-i-Khumri for farm labour work, reflecting a legacy of migration to the latter area during conflict periods, where some still have *shinasa* with land owners there.

Other work and wage labour opportunities have changed much more with political and economic shifts. For example, the practice of *baqali*, or informal trade of goods and groceries from the city to rural areas by donkey, was common practice during conflict, particularly by the very young and elderly not at risk of capture and military conscription. Due to the relatively high levels of conflict damage as well as high levels of returnee



assistance in Village B, wage labourers benefited from a kind of building “boom” in the early years after return, from 2002-3. As Household B06 explained, “[Building work] was good when I came back from Pakistan, because all the houses were ruined. Now all of the houses have been reconstructed, so there is no masonry work.” Households in Village B report the most change in types of work undertaken compared to the other two villages, though the collapse in the local market for *gillims* mean that this income has been lost to households in all three settlements over a longer period of time.

The expansion of the brickfields in Mazar-i-Sharif in the last four to five years has absorbed a large proportion of the district labour supply during the summer months. According to Household C07, while this work is widespread in Villages A and B, it is not in Village C where fewer people migrated to Pakistan and Iran during conflict and acquired the skill. Though physically difficult work, brick-making has the benefit of a more consistent income, at around 250 Afs per day—slightly above that of general wage labouring in Sar-i-Pul. Access to this work is mediated through brokers known as *jamadars*, who take a small commission on the daily earnings of recruits. Earnings for brick work, only available in summer months, is said to be around double that of typical wage labour rates in winter months due to higher demand, though this was not the case in 2008-9 when a clampdown on illegal migration by the Iranian government meant excess workers in the brickfields of Mazar-i-Sharif. Combined with high food prices, labourers, particularly from Villages A and B, were less able to accumulate savings from brick work for the leaner winter months, as B06 explained, “Before we were eating 150 or 200 Afs per week and this year we eat 500 or 600 Afs per week in Mazar. It is difficult to save money from brick work in Mazar,” causing some to seek alternatives.

#### 4.6 Women’s income-generating work

It is important to recognise the role of women’s incomes in household economic security. Their small but regular contributions to household welfare are in many cases not acknowledged by households themselves, despite covering household essentials like tea, soap and salt as well as building small cash reserves for unexpected costs. The wife of Household A05 said to this effect, “Life would not pass if we did not spin wool.” The type of work varied across the villages, with nearly all women in Village A spinning wool, women in Village B often tailoring and spinning thinner wool for higher profits, and those in Village C producing a wider range of embroidery, *gillims* and *shal* in addition to wool spinning. Any diversity between the villages is determined largely by skill, wealth and number of women in the home. Women reported using their small incomes to meet health costs (A06), to repay debts in village shops (A07), and to ensure continued credit access. More women in Village C reported having the skills to make high value products like *gillims*, along with a few in the other two villages who spent time as internally displaced persons in Hazara villages, though they lack the resources to apply this skill.

Women’s home-based economic activities have also seen many changes. During conflict displacement, the sewing of hats for sale by *baqali* traders was an important household income source. As supply of these in urban markets increased due to the introduction of sewing machines and fashion changes, this particular craft has declined. Household A05 reported that a demand for prayer mats, *namads* (felt rugs) and other crafts has not existed for 20 years, something corroborated by Household B05: “The fighting changed everything and disrupted our lives, and now I think this work is not useful for the people. I don’t know why.” It seems therefore that the market for products traditionally made by women has declined over a long period, with conditions nonexistent for recovery. With the recent drought, dwindling livestock numbers made raw material for many such crafts scarcer, and travelling traders ceased to visit as market demand dropped. The impact on most households, particularly in Village A, was that women had to work longer hours

to secure the same income, as the market rate for one *pao* of spun wool fell from 10 to 7 Afs—entailing roughly a full day’s work. Conversely, with many women facing already increased domestic burdens due to the absence of migrated male members, it can mean less time can be devoted to those income-generating options that are available.

Importantly, many women explained that small profits are often reinvested in activities with higher marginal returns, such as weaving *shal* from unravelled second-hand woollen clothing or buying the materials with which to make *toshaks* (mattresses). For some women such as in Household B08, workloads are heavier particularly leading up to Eid festivals, with the female household head of C05 stating that the entire cost of the festivals was being met through the sales of *shal*. At other times of year, and particularly during the drought, demand for such items is less. Women are traditionally responsible for crafting items like *toshaks*, *shals* and decorative items for the dowry of their daughters. With fewer marriages taking place in all three villages during the period of economic hardship, households such as C08 instead work for future consumption, creating and saving such items for the eventual marriage of their daughters. A neighbour of Household C08 reported using even small income such as the sale of eggs to accumulate material to provide dowry.

Women’s tasks in farming, according to various respondents,<sup>51</sup> include weeding and thinning crops, harvesting and gleaning in addition to domestic tasks, such as the collection of fuel and water. Both types of work have become more difficult and time-consuming in all three villages due to drought. Though mentioned only by one key informant in Village B, the phenomenon of women taking on more physically demanding farming tasks (such as reaping) is an increased burden on women to handle both domestic and economic tasks. It is also indicative of the indirect effect of drought on the household division of labour and male out-migration. Women’s economic work is resisted, or denied due to cultural norms in many respects, though clearly plays an important, though modest role in family welfare. The female respondent from Household C03, for example, admitted to earning and saving money without the knowledge of her husband, which was then spent on an unexpected health shock.

## 4.7 Food security

Given the vulnerability of rain-fed agriculture to drought and limited local wage labour opportunities, it is appropriate to make particular reference to food security outcomes over the study period. Very few households in the sample, including A04 and B01, are frequently able to meet their consumption needs through agriculture alone (see tables in Section 3). It is common for even relatively prosperous households such as A01 to be self-sufficient only for six months in a typical year, comparable to C06 and C08, who attain around six months of sufficiency through their in-kind farm labour incomes in a good year. With the exception of medium-sized households like B07 who reported having surplus harvest to sell in a good harvest (like in 2003) from a small plot of land (15 *sers* capacity), the vast majority of poor households were not able to stock wheat for the winter in the last two to three years. Seasonal food insecurity in the late winter and early spring has much to do with the severity of the late winter weather. A neighbour of Household B07 described a childhood song she recalled that refers to this critical period, when winter stocks may run out at a time when paid work is in short supply.

We said that *hoot* (February-March) has come, the dishes are full of milk. If the *hoot* months are good, you can see that the dishes are still full of milk, whereas if the *hoot* months are bad, then all the animals have been killed.

Household B06, amongst others, reported that the extremely cold winter of 2007-8 depleted their reserves and livestock, leaving them vulnerable to the third and most acute year of

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51 Including key informant interview with Village B farmer.

drought that followed. That year, higher food prices became the major factor preventing people from accumulating stocks through the markets they have been forced increasingly to rely on. As Household A08 said, even households depending on marginal economic activities could accrue winter stocks when market prices were more favourable:

[In the past] we ordinarily had something saved at home because prices were lower, not like now. Even a widow could make a living for her children and herself by collecting firewood and selling it in the city.

Conversations with widow-headed households such as A06 confirmed this:

[Before the drought], I didn't know how much I should pay for a *ser* (of flour), or how much bread I could bake from a *ser* of flour. It was recently that I came to know such things.

With wheat prices up from a low of 27 Afs per *ser* in 2002-3 to between 250-320 Afs per *ser* in 2007-8, it is clear why market reliance was mentioned to be a source of great anxiety. As Household B05 stated:

When I get the necessary wheat from the land, I am calm and relaxed. But when I buy the wheat in a bad year I am always worried if it finished today, what should I do tomorrow? In a good year, I make flour from some sacks of wheat and put it in a corner at home and concern no more.

As prices rose sharply during the food crisis of 2007-8, grain sellers in Sar-i-Pul reported the panic buying of stocks, with people selling livestock in order to buy wheat to offset the risk of further price rises. Riots in Maimana, Faryab about the price of food made grain sellers in Sar-i-Pul concerned enough about the effects of the price rises on the impoverished population to move and hide their stocks.<sup>52</sup> Prices came down rapidly following the onset of the rains, as traders who had been hoarding stock speculatively released their goods onto the markets, driving prices back down to 150 Afs per *ser*.

Though all of the study households were put under strain by the combination of adverse factors, certain households are regularly vulnerable to food insecurity and exercise caution with regards to their stock. The female respondent of Household B07 said, "My husband was very careful about wheat. He did not sell wheat at all unless he was obliged to...because we have no male workers in the household." Having no working-age sons in the household is a significant element of Household B07's insecurity. Though households depending on wage labour may also be poor and may have to migrate great distances to secure a liveable income due to labour market factors, this option is not viable for sole adult men in a household unit. Household A07, similarly with no sons, was compelled to resort to unsustainable ways of coping with food shortage, including selling borrowed livestock at a loss when credit availability was exhausted. Many households, including wealthier ones such as B01 and B04, reported cutting back on the quantity and quality of food consumed—missing lunch and preparing cheaper alternatives, sometimes consisting of just bread and tea. Respondents in Village B reported supplementing their diet with wild foods such as mushrooms and wild spinach in springtime, particularly those households with children who are able and available to collect them.

Though in some cases consumption reduction may represent a cautionary strategy with a view to preserving stocks rather than a reflection of immediate shortage, doing so has obvious impacts on the nutritional health of the households. Households replaced foods of dietary preference such as sesame oil for cheaper varieties of vegetable oil, considered *haram* by the wife of Household B05 and others on account of it being considered unhealthy. The shortage or rationing of fuel is another factor behind consumption reduction, as the head of Household C05 said, "We are also like other people, we make dough one day

52 Key informant interview, flour and grain seller, Sar-i-Pul bazaar.

and for four days we are eating, because we don't have that much firewood or flour to cook on a daily basis." On the other hand, landless but labour sufficient Households A05, C06 and C08 did not report reducing their consumption significantly during the drought period. Though their livelihoods can be seen to be vulnerable in many other aspects, the availability of workers able to access labour opportunities in hard times ensures that these households have not faced absolute food shortages.

## 4.8 Education

The construction of schools for boys and girls in Villages B and C has provided unprecedented levels of access to education for the children of all three villages. The extent to which this opportunity has been taken up varies between the villages and households, however, and is shaped by a number of perceptions and factors.

Largely positive attitudes toward education were found in all three sites, but particularly in Village B with the influence of the longer periods spent in Pakistan and more role models within the community of the potential financial rewards of education. The practical and material benefits of literacy were often mentioned, as were the benefits of social confidence and moral grounding, phrased in the context of "knowing right from wrong." The benefits of madrassa education are seen as equally important for some of these same reasons, leading some households to send one or more of their children to school, and the other to madrassa. The benefits of religious training are also seen to accrue to parents too in terms of reputation, to "keep bright" the family name (A08), and also that their children will be able to pray for them after their death. The attitudes toward education among different wealth groups did not vary significantly.

The impact of the drought on school attendance was mixed. Children of poorer families in Village A appeared to attend with greater frequency, as livestock numbers fell and seasonal migration to pasture (*ailaq*) was no longer necessary. Despite the frequency with which respondents talked of the importance of education, the food aid provided became a more and more important factor in attendance, as the wife of Household A04 even said, "Our people do not go to school for education." On the other hand, according to school teacher B04, "most children" dropped out of school to work in Village B as their economic contribution to the household (in the form of collecting dung and fuel and entering bonded labour) became more crucial as debt levels mounted.

Many respondents among the sample from Village A felt that school access for their children, as with other public services located in Village B, was exclusionary and biased against them. Numerous respondents report problems in enrolling for the school as their children are deemed too small to attend. Parents also fear for the safety of their children, as Village B boys were said to be physically bigger, and the schools mirror the broader power relations between the two villages. Household A05 explained:

I am worried that they might be beaten on the way or in school...If children fight among themselves and a child from a powerful household beats the other child, the rest of the children couldn't object...because he is from a powerful household who knows many people.

Poor learning outcomes are another source of dissatisfaction with local educational facilities, as well as with the literacy courses provided by an NGO for women in Village B.

## 5. Household Responses

### 5.1 Introduction

Having illustrated some of the changes and outcomes in major components of rural livelihoods in the study villages as experienced by different respondent households, this section takes closer look at how households have responded to their changing circumstances. Particular attention is paid to the role of structural, institutional and contextual factors in enabling or restraining household responses and the extent to which households may overcome internal and external constraints to achieve livelihood security. Important responses enacted include adjusting work activities and the household division of labour (including women and children's work), migration and credit. Household abilities to pursue different activities depend to a great extent on existing labour and human resources (skills, good health) as well as their social resources, and ability to draw on these effectively in times of economic hardship.

### 5.2 Local work

Diversifying and intensifying locally available work options are two of the most immediate responses to drought. Households with already diverse work portfolios and income sources, such as B01, are obviously more robust against livelihood shocks, though diversification is sometimes equally a response to cope with a shock such as drought, or economic insecurity more generally. The head of Household A05, for example, refers to changing activities with relative frequency, ranging from buying and selling grapes one year, to construction and farm labouring the next, based on prevailing market conditions. Many households, including A05, A07 and A08, resorted to collecting firewood (bushes) for sale, representing an intensification of an existing activity. Spinning wool, particularly for households where women were left behind through the out-migration of men, became a more central part of daily income and therefore escalated. On the other hand, women from wealthier households such as B01 spun less wool in light of this decline. Households therefore have inherently varying degrees of choice with regard to these options, where alternatives and diversification are mediated to a great extent by social relations.

Access to work opportunities is dependent not only on household demography, but rooted firmly within village societies and social relations. Reputation is a social resource that has influence on many levels. On the first level, being known as a “hard worker” was seen by Household C05 as being an important condition enabling access.

Labour work is not available for everyone. Those who work hard can find work, otherwise it is very difficult. [Points to his cousin] If he is working hard, people prefer to take him for labour work instead of me if I am not a hard worker.

The mother of Household C06 too, explained that her children are selected for casual labour because they “well-mannered” and “behave well with people.” This may be particularly important for coveted contract labour opportunities, which offer households a regular income normally in addition to covering the living expenses of the contracted labourer, thus reducing household expenditure. The head of Household A08 uses similar reasoning to explain why such opportunities are offered to his son, and not others. Shepherding, contracted and bonded labour work for young and adolescent boys can provide a significant degree of economic security for a poor household, with payment found to be up to 14,000 Afs for three months, as in the case of C02. Contracted labourers are also normally provided with new clothes and shoes and fed by the host household, as are shepherds, who are provided meals by the multiple households which they serve.



A reputation of diligence and good character, however, must be balanced with other perceptions of reputation in order to secure contracted work against a great deal of competition. Asked if this work can be pro-actively sought, A08 explained:

If we go there they will think that these people are hungry and can't work. They just came here to find food. The *bais* think that these people come here and they are trying to make us trust them and get information about our homes.

In patronage relationships therefore, the power is clearly all in the hands of the wealthier employers. Conversely, a degree of obligation is implied in explaining A05's access to work: "[The *bai*] was a friend of my father and that is why he has given me this job. Otherwise there are so many workers standing by the *chawk* (public square) and nobody would take an old man like me to work." In reality therefore, often understated personal or extended family connections are the most important factor mediating preferential access to work or labour locally. In the absence of these connections or work available through them, individuals must resort to very marginal economic activities, such as collecting firewood from the hills to sell in the city. These types of work have low barriers to entry as well as low returns, and so may be performed either as a main income source in poor households, such as the sole earner in A07, or as a diversification strategy such as household A08's second son. Relatively wealthier households may also undertake such activities as a supplementary income source, as C01 explained:

We, both wives...also went to the desert to collect bushes and dung, packed them into sacks and the boys took them to town to sell. Other villagers asked us why we also did this, because we are *bai* people. We replied that it didn't matter, because it was work, and we were helping our *bai* make money.

A pooled labour system known as *ashar* acts as an important social institution providing a source of labour for many households during the finite window within which harvesting must be completed. It is particularly important for those who lack household labour resources more generally. *Ashar* is traditionally compensated with a meal or reciprocated with labour, and is also employed in public works. The system is imbued with elements of charity and *sawab*,<sup>53</sup> as is evident in the case of the head of Household B06 for example, who speaks of developing a friendship with a man in Village A. Though the man passed away, his sons still regularly help B06 at harvest time, as in the past when the sons of the head of B06 were small. Through different friends, B06 is able to freely access draught power and ploughing services. Though he once reciprocated using his skills as a builder and cobbler, he no longer can to the same extent, emphasising that such shared labour systems are a part of broader social support mechanisms. Wealthier households may benefit from the same system for different reasons, as the head of *shura*'s Household B01 said they felt villagers worked freely for them at times with the expectation of being awarded aid entitlements.

Overall, there are countless examples across all three villages of households accessing work opportunities, particularly one-off and extraordinary tasks, through social connections. The sons of Household B05 for example were given animal vaccination work due to the connections they had made at school, while respondents in Village B insisted that ad-hoc work opportunities, such as on a *woliswali* building construction project and electoral registration, were open only to those connected to the brokers—often members of the village elite. According to *shura* worker B03, "Some *pahlawan* (strong men)...take full advantage of [election] work. I think they are given 15,000 Afs for this project. They and their close relatives who worked as guards and registrars and made lots of money." Increasingly, NGO-initiated programmes offer more such opportunities to women, as teachers or supervisors on literacy and tailoring courses, focused to a large

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53 A good deed, rewarded in the after-life.

degree in the district centre like Village B. Connections are equally important in women being selected for such opportunities, whether through relationships and influence, or in gaining the sympathy of community leaders who allocate the work, as seen in the disabled daughter-in-law of Household B08.

Fulfilling locally defined notions of “deserving” can prove to be a key resource for poorer households in many other aspects too, for example Household A05’s continued access to credit despite low repayment rate. Widows who are obliged to undertake paid domestic work in the homes of others also tend to warrant particular sympathy, perhaps leading to assistance, as A03 said, “If a woman could find such work, people might help her as well, because they would think that that woman needed to do that work.” A discussion of the interplay of cultural norms around gender and the necessity and ability of some women to access work is provided later in this section. Further still, cultural values and identities at the most general level too play a role in shaping work access for particular groups. This is particularly true in Village C, where the Arab population has historically worked as shepherds and hired farmers for the Pashtun minority. The reason given by a key informant on the matter was as follows: “We are not as good as Arabs at agriculture and shepherding. So for this reason we hired C08, because he is an Arab and knows very well about agriculture.”<sup>54</sup>

For those not included in the reach of these social and cultural arrangements, other more market-based access points must be found. *Jamadars* and *tikadars* are important labour institutions in this respect, enabling large numbers of men to find seasonal and contractual work in Mazar-i-Sharif and abroad. The term *tikadars* refers to factory owners who employ middle-men known as *jamadars* to act as agents to recruit labour from their local area. In the case of brick plants, each *jamadar* takes around 10 to 20 Afs as commission per worker for every 1,000 bricks the worker produces. *Jamadars* act as a credit line for workers or their families in the village, particularly where migration to Pakistan has taken place, with wages paid in advance of the trip to Pakistan. *Jamadars* are fairly inclusive institutions enabling access to labour for most able-bodied men in Village A and B, with obvious benefits to households in terms of credit and regular income. However, *jamadars* are not external to the local social context, and as mentioned, do not operate in Village C apparently due to lack of brick-making history among the community at large.

In Village C, there is some evidence of workers instead grouping together to seek and undertake work and dividing profits equally, as in the case of C06, who operates such an arrangement with friends who offer building services collectively. In the absence of direct linkages to distant labour markets through *jamadars*, many labourers in the village travel extensively. Household C07 is one such poor household with no local connections to influential people or *jamadars*. Last year, the head travelled to Kunduz, Pul-i-Khumri and Kohistanat District of Sar-i-Pul in one summer for work, achieving much less consistent work and income than those who could take advantage of other connections. C05, who had attempted to enter Iran illegally last summer, ended up working in Nimroz, Kandahar, Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif in the same year, motivated by a need to repay debts and substitute farm incomes lost in the drought.

### 5.3 Migration and its consequences

Migration, both within northern Afghanistan and to Pakistan and Iran, has been a major coping response across the north of Afghanistan to drought. Out-migration has occurred on a greater scale during the recent drought of 1998-2001, when the brick-making industry in Mazar-i-Sharif offered fewer opportunities, and competition for off-farm jobs

<sup>54</sup> Pashtun elder, Village C.

was less. Although it offered crucial access to income at a time of depression in the rural economy, migration had numerous debilitating effects on livelihood security for many households. Most households in the study, including the larger sample of households with whom informal interviews were conducted, had at least one household member that had migrated within the previous three years. The few exceptions included Households A07 and C07, who had no sons, wealthy households such as C01, who benefitted sufficiently from both bonded labour and patronage relationships, and C02 who gained significant financial rewards as treasurer of the Village C *shura*. In numerous cases within the original 20-household sample, as mentioned in Section 3, whole families had left the village, highlighting the extent of livelihood breakdown that had may have been experienced. For others such as Household A03, migration may not reflect quite the same levels of distress, with debt repayment and saving for bride price being motivations of equal importance to sending remittance home for more routine consumptive purposes. In Village B, with the most pronounced history of international migration, current patterns are an extension of long entrenched practices. As a key informant farmer said, “In previous years in *mizan* (September-October) most people used to go to Iran or Pakistan,” though continued to say that as food and fodder prices dropped, fewer people were going. The same is true of migration to the brickfields of Mazar-i-Sharif, which has been an established method of affording food stocks for the winter. The reliance on these income sources in particular years should therefore be seen as largely an extension of an existing livelihood strategy. Nevertheless its increasing and longer extent should be noted as an indication of more acute livelihoods stress.

Iran and Pakistan compare very differently as international migration destinations. In part, the choice is a result of historical migration patterns—with Iran being a more common destination in Villages A and C and Pakistan being the more frequent choice in Village B, which has a more extensive history of labour and refugee movements to the country. As the eldest daughter of Household B06 described:

During the summer, a lot of men from my family went to Mazar-i-Sharif to make bricks, and during the winter they came home or they went to Pakistan. Because of the drought, they cannot work on the land, and due to this they go to Pakistan in the winter. They have been going to Pakistan for about four years now.

In Village B, many returnee respondents returned to the same areas and types of employment they undertook as refugees, with subsequent seasonal and wholesale migration maintaining these village links to work opportunities, typically in brickfields. Pakistan was noted as a preferred destination, again particularly in Village B because of the better treatment of Afghans by authorities and the possibility to take women and other family members. Advances given through *jamadars*, and the relative ease with which money can be transferred through these individuals and fellow *qawm* members continue to make it an attractive option.

On the other hand, work in Iran is thought to pay higher wages and provide a higher standard of living. Labour institutions arranging work in Iran are more exploitative and place a higher burden of risk on the migrant. Through smugglers, would-be migrants typically incur initial debts of around 30,000 Afs which is to be repaid through earnings on arrival. The route is dangerous through southeast Afghanistan and the eastern parts of Iran, and migrants run the risk of exposure, exploitation and deportation once there—often instantaneously and without the opportunity to collect wages owed. For example, migrant C06 was deported after 6 months, and was unable to claim the 10,000 Afs he said he is still owed by his Iranian employer. Many who therefore fail to enter or are deported from Iran incur the burden of even greater debt in the process, particularly in the latter case, when they are nonetheless obliged to repay the full 30,000 Afs to the



smuggler. A judge from Sar-i-Pul<sup>55</sup> trying a case against a smuggler on behalf of a man whose two sons had died in his custody explained that migrants are “sold” by smugglers to Baluch human traffickers on the Iranian border. In some cases, such as the one he was working on, migrants are made to do forced unpaid labour in eastern Iran, facing violence and risking death from dehydration and exposure in the desert if they escape.

In light of these risks, the decision to migrate, particularly to Iran, is never taken lightly within a household. Better-off households may delay such migration as long as possible for example A02 waited for migratory risks to reduce. Others may either be more willing or have less choice to accept the risks involved. With news that Iranian businesses that employed Afghans were being prosecuted in a state clamp-down, fewer villagers attempted the journey in 2009. Households feared particularly for their sons who are engaged. For example the mother in Household C05 who forbade her son from attempting the journey to Iran after he failed to cross the border, was captured by the Taliban and was subsequently forced to work in a poppy-processing plant in Nimroz.

Another concern stems from the perception that migrant life in Iran poses a threat to Afghan cultural values and reputation in the form of gambling and drugs. Though the mother felt it necessary, the head of Household C02 prevented his sons from going to Iran out of concern that they would become *kharab* (ruined, in a moral sense) and “adulterers.” This idea forms part of the reason why some households insist that young men go accompanied by a trusted friend or relative. The mother of Household A03, who tried to persuade her son and his best friend not to go to Iran, described her worry:

When they didn’t agree with me, I went to my brother-in-law who the boys wanted to go with and told him that he would be responsible for my son. I asked him to take care of my son carefully and not to separate my son from himself. I told him that the money he might earn is not as important as his name is. I told him that I brought up my son with a good reputation among the community and never allowed him to do something wrong, even though my husband was not around.

Going with close trusted relatives is one way in which migrants try to manage the risks collectively. The husband of Household A04 was imprisoned at the Iranian border, and his close friend who had entered successfully was able to borrow 25,000 *tomán* (referring to Iranian currency) to secure his release. Household B04 reflected these concerns over financial risks. “[My son] asked his father to allow him to go to Pakistan, but his father said ‘No, my son. You might get sick there, or fall into debt. Don’t go.’” His concerns were well-founded, as many respondents reported encountering severe health problems in Pakistan, often due to weather-related working conditions in the brickfields.

In addition to risk elements, migration abroad is resisted where possible by many on the grounds of identity and belonging, having already experienced life as refugees. For example, Household B05 was determined not to allow his sons to migrate out of Afghanistan despite the potential returns, saying, “This small amount of bread is enough for us, it is better that you not go to Pakistan.” A participant of the female focus group in Village A encapsulated the overall sentiment well:

Recently our men have been talking about going to Pakistan. They say there is more opportunity for them to find a work there as well as the weather is warm there so they have no need to pay money to heat the house there. I think we will have to do this and go to Pakistan if the government does not care for us and do not help us to overcome these problems. Otherwise who would like to leave their own homeland for a strange country?

55 Informal interview, Sayyad District, 26 November 2008.

Some with firsthand experience would agree. As longer-term migrants to Iran, the head of Household C03 explained that the reasons for returning to Afghanistan had much to do with their host country's perceived treatment:

Our children could not walk the streets freely, and Afghans were not allowed to go to Iranian schools or buy bread from bakeries. They were told, "Hungry Afghans, go back to your country!" We were living in fear and strictness there, the children were beaten. This is why my husband decided that we should come back to our homeland and our children can go to school and feel more freedom.

Migration generally was viewed by respondents as very much a temporary measure, insisting that men would likely return to farm after the arrival of rains or having successfully saved for their bride prices. The actual duration and some of the longer-term implications of recent international migration remain to be seen.

The significant levels of migration from the area, as seen in the study sample and mentioned by focus group respondents in all three villages, have had profound knock-on and feedback effects on the household economy of those who remained in the villages. In many instances, the female-headed units left behind have become increasingly income- and food-insecure, leading to some temporary household-merging as women and their children returned to their paternal homes (for example in Households A01, C05 and B06). In the case of A01, the daughter-in-law has become wholly dependent on her parents' household for sustenance, as her husband has been in Iran for 13 years. The members of A04 left in the village are also cared for to some degree by the brother of the household head who was formerly part of the same joint family system. Due to cultural limitations on women's public movement and a lack of males in the immediate household, A04 requires assistance in obtaining groceries from the bazaar. The loss of male labour from the household economy leads to other stresses related to farming capacity. A04, like one or two other wealthier farming households, now has to hire farm labour due to the reduced number of workers in the household, a cost not faced before. Even with levels of cultivation reduced, the burdens are felt strongly by those who remain. Household C05, speaking of the intensification of his own work due to migration, said, "Now I am here in the village and farming, and my brother went to a foreign country. He is younger than me. I am very tired." A few mentioned that the responsibilities of reaping crops and collecting firewood had fallen to women in the absence of men.<sup>56</sup>

School teacher B04 confirmed that many children have dropped out of his class owing to the pressures at home to tend livestock or enter paid employment resulting from the out-migration of male workers. Various households took older boys out of school to assist in contributing to the household income including A03, who had many debts. Others with limited or reduced labour resources such as A02 and C08 also did the same. The female head of Household A02 said:

We have no money to hire a wage labourer to take care of the animals like we used to in the past, so we had to take our youngest son out of school to take care of the livestock...we want our elder son to study and finish school. He is now in the 8th grade, while this boy only went for four years.

This highlights the difficult trade-offs households make between future benefits and immediate needs, an issue analysed in more detail in an AREU study on child labour.<sup>57</sup> Those that dropped out forfeited their entitlements for food aid delivered via the school, as did certain women in terms of attendance at compensated literacy and tailoring

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56 Key informant interview, Village B farmer.

57 See Pamela Hunte, *Beyond Poverty: Factors Influencing Decisions to Use Child Labour in Rural and Urban Afghanistan* (Kabul: AREU, 2009).

courses in Village B. Greater domestic burdens mean, particularly when mothers or co-wives had migrated, that women were not able to attend with enough regularity to access the aid on offer. A poor female neighbour of Household B07, for example, was compelled to go to Mazar-i-Sharif to work in the brickfields as her husband was old. She missed three days of the course and thus could not qualify for aid.

Many households reported unmarried sons staying longer in Iran and other destinations than their families wished them to. Nevertheless, households remained certain of their return, causing them to send other sons and family members to retrieve them. Again, this is a source of anxiety that households cope with, particularly due to sporadic communication and the well known risks involved on such migratory paths. Household B04's head said, "For four nights I have not slept a wink. It is said my son has been lost in Tata, Pakistan. Nobody has seen him." On a more routine level too, of coping with absence of family members who obviously form part of a key family social support system, C03 said, "When I see other women have tea along with their husbands in their yard, I miss my husband. My husband and son are not here. It makes me weep after them." Women such as the wives of C03 and A03 rely heavily on credit as a result of migration to Iran, where migrants are unable to begin sending remittance until they have repaid the cost of their journey to smugglers. Due to this potential source of good income, accessing credit does not appear difficult, particularly where strong immediate family networks remain, though clearly the possibility of deportation, injury or death of the migrant household head puts the family's future livelihood at risk.

Conversely, migration—both recent and previous—has had discernable beneficial effects for many households. As briefly mentioned, the strong bonds formed by the community of Village B during an extensive period of joint migration to Pakistan still have residual benefits today. Asked if other refugee households helped one another to the present day, B03 responded, "Yes, still now I am in close touch with them and we help each other as much as we can. Because of those long years abroad, we know each other well." Attitudinal changes were also reported, which may or may not translate directly into action in the context of the village societies. Having spent a long time in Iran for example, A03's sons were less willing to marry a "village girl" despite the insistence of their parents. Attitudes toward women's movement became more liberal than others, for instance a female respondent of Household C05 explained that the village men, having returned from seeing "very beautiful places and the women without any *burqa*...didn't say anything [anymore] about us moving around in the city, either alone or together." Changing attitudes to women's work and movement will be explored further in Section 5.5. From Pakistan, people report acquiring new skills and ideas, for example cooking and hygiene practices (A06), farming ideas such as the cultivation of fruit trees (B06), a more positive outlook with regards to education,<sup>58</sup> and somewhat higher expectations of their own government in terms of public service provision.

## 5.4 Reliance on social resources

*"Nobody has seen a hungry grave in Afghanistan."*

This popular idiom, heard numerous times over the course of this research, alludes to the strength and inclusiveness of local social protection mechanisms in the context of rural Afghanistan. Various mechanisms and social institutions allow individuals and households a degree of social protection and security, albeit with certain trade-offs and limitations. Household livelihoods are simultaneously enabled and constrained in many respects by multiple, complex social relationships. As mentioned throughout this report, such connections are central to a household's potential to access resources, services,

<sup>58</sup> Key informant, NGO education project employee.

social support and opportunities, while also implying a level of reciprocal obligation. As will be discussed, people aim to foster links with other individuals and households whom they think might be able to offer various kinds of support in the future, from influential people such as landlords to larger households with more labour resources. In the next section, ways in which households develop social resources through marriage are explored.

### **Credit**

The data from all three villages illustrates that credit is perhaps the main and most inclusive local social safety net, with impressive reach and durability, particularly considering the widespread nature of the economic stress in the study area. The great majority of respondent households have and maintained access to credit. Local credit systems are reported to have a long and established history, with loans frequently taken for routine consumption smoothing and not just as a last resort. As the household tables show, many respondents had amassed very large debts in order to meet daily consumption needs over the period of the drought, with the limits of credit availability, even for the poorest and least creditworthy, only diminishing in the final stages of the drought. Numerous demands for credit within a household resulted in households sometimes servicing multiple debts, such as Household C06, who were simultaneously repaying a health-related debt through wage labour earnings while daily consumptions were being covered by a separate credit source. Village A, with fewer local lenders saw typically lower amounts being borrowed. Credit availability was highest in Village B with its sizable number of shops, though average debt levels were highest in Village C where, close to the city, credit sources were more numerous but where lenders often insisted on collateral. It was only in Village C where charging interest was reportedly common. Certain poorer households with single or otherwise limited income sources were typically those which had increasingly come to rely on credit for survival, such as Household A07 who reports a seasonal dependence on credit for the last five winters, beyond the leanest months of December to February.

Shopkeepers are a primary source of cash and in-kind credit. Besides compassionate motives to lend, Village B shopkeepers explained that lending was an important part of maintaining their customer bases, with smaller stores able to lend to two to three individuals per month.<sup>59</sup> Mutual familiarity in the more closed communities of Village A and B was sufficient to ensure creditworthiness for almost all respondents, though commonly goods were paid for in part, in order to at least demonstrate the intention and will to pay. Respondents in Village A were the first to report credit sources drying up, and the inability of even *bais* to borrow. Credit was then solicited where possible from more distant relatives and urban lenders, though often on worse terms and with expectations of quicker repayment. Household C05 explained that city lenders expected *zamanat*, or a deposit, before borrowing, and that wealthier individuals lend limited amounts to poor people (up to 500 Afs) that was characterised as “*sob meta shab megera*” (giving in the morning and wanting repayment by evening).

Credit comes in various forms, including labour, services such as ploughing, agricultural input materials as well as food and cash, and is accessed in different ways. The few individuals in receipt of a salary, such as teacher B04, and those with sons-in-laws working to provide the household with bride-price payments were considered among the most creditworthy. Reputation obviously plays a key role in accessing credit for most. In the case of Household C06, the ailing household head was keen to ensure that such relationships of trust were maintained in order that credit lines remained open to his sons.

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59 Key informant, Shopkeeper in Village B.

Some days before my father's sickness when he was fine and healthy, he took me to the shopkeeper, who was his friend, and said to him, "This is my son, whenever he comes you give him credit whatever he wants." So that's why he gave me the credit.

*Taqawi*, the lending and borrowing of small amounts of food and other household essentials, was common among all wealth groups, with repayment made when means allowed or at the following harvest time. This type of credit remained available in most instances beyond cash credit, providing a modest but important safety net on a day to day level for poor households.

Access to credit through client-patron relationships is a key resource for poorer households. These relationships are often durable and outlast original labour arrangements, as demonstrated in the case of widow A06, who is able to borrow extensively from the many shopkeepers for whom her husband used to work. In her case credit is often considered a salary advance, which her son then repays through labour. Household A05 too is able to draw on future earnings in advance, as the wife of the household explains, "My sons usually took money in advance from a landlord they already worked for in order to buy food and stock for the winter. Then he promised the landlord to work in the next summer season for him for free." Though an important means of consumption smoothing, this arrangement has obvious drawbacks for longer term livelihood security. The son of female-headed household B08, in light of this risk, turned down credit offered to him by a *jamadar* out of concern for his prospects of repaying.

Considering the importance of credit as a coping mechanism for many and the social relationships on which it depends, debt repayment is a high priority for households. The wife of Household B03's statement about debt repayment echoed many others: "We have taken a lot of loans, and first we should pay back our debt. When we have finished paying off our debts, then we will think about other things to do." This is especially true of credit taken from non-relatives and city lenders, where fear of damage to personal reputation comes into play. As Household A07 head explained, "If I borrow money from them and I cannot pay it back on time, then they will come to the village and shout at me, and I will lose face." In the case of C05, a daughter was thrown out of her marital home by her father-in-law when his son accrued insurmountable debts in Iran, as he feared that the creditor would come to ask him for money. Such fear is in part related to religious tenets of dying while in debt, though largely to do with damaging reputation and social standing, and bringing shame on the family. For this reason, Household C07 explained that it was better to repay shopkeepers gradually with what little he had, rather than hide from them, as "if you bother him, then he will not lend you again." Shame was a reason for some households not to want to turn to debt, as Household A06 said,

If I would ask for my relatives' help I might be answered in this way, "she has grown up in [Village B] and used to get everything she wanted easily, but now look! She has to ask for a small thing!

Methods and strategies for debt repayment reflect household resource levels and current consumption imperatives. Many prefer to repay through livestock sales, as wheat prices are lower at harvest time when many debts are expected to be repaid. In the particularly difficult drought years, households are often left with little choice but to do so anyway where harvests are achieved, meaning that harvests cannot be stocked for the coming winter. As previously mentioned, taking a child or children out of school to work and migration to Iran and Pakistan are core responses to debt repayment demands, even for relatively wealthier households such as B03. Wage labourers are forced to work longer and harder in Mazar-i-Sharif and Pakistan in order to make repayments, while those without such family labour resort to more desperate means, such as A07, who sold his



young daughters primarily to service debts. Others mentioned the possibility of having to sell land to meet repayment and preserve local help relationships, thereby trading off future consumption for immediate needs.

### ***Social cohesion and reciprocity***

Acts of charity, both within the framework of Islam and more directly between individual households, constitute an important safety net for the poorest households. Almost all households reported a decline in such social support mechanisms due largely to food price increases, though the mosques in each village often continued to act as a channel for public charity on a weekly basis.

Before, the people of [Village B] used to give 10 to 15 *khairats* (alms) per year, but now people cannot do even one since the fall of the Taliban...now, the people of every mosque do their own *khairat*, 30 or 40 men from the same mosque gather...and eat together.<sup>60</sup>

Mosques are therefore important agents for social welfare within communities. The collapse of wider systems of charity comes to the obvious detriment of poorer households who depend much on the generosity of the *qawm*, such as A07, and various households in the original 20-household sample from Village C who reported begging as a primary household income source. Again, however, not all poor households are in receipt of charity, such as Household C07, who said, “I have not taken any charity and will never take it in future. I can work, then charity is not my right...according to the Holy Book.” In terms of broader socio-religious obligations, households expressed great concern that they could not afford to offer *khairat* when directed to, or to make an animal sacrifice at Eid (*qurbani*), in some cases borrowing in order to do so. B04 said,

My mother did *qurbani* this year. She tried hard and made what she could from *chalak* or from her land, so that she could do *qurbani*. Her motivation for that was so that we would have some meat to eat on Eid days, and we would not look at other families eating meat at Eid while we did not.

Some households reported that it was not just the means to provide charity which declined in the recent period of economic stress, but social cohesion within the community too. According to Household C06, “Before people cared more about each other, the rich people did not let the poor people go hungry. Now there is no compassion, feeling, responsibility. They are all gone.” B02 expressed the same dismay: “Whenever you are in difficulty, your relatives become strangers. Nowadays I do not have anything, so all my brothers have become strangers.” Collective action within the communities also reduced, as B06 explained:

In the summertime, people collected money and they fixed the [water] pump. Now they cannot collect the money...and no one cares about the pump anymore. Everyone thinks about themselves.

Village C in particular, showing lower levels of mutual trust and reciprocity, appears to have suffered in this regard, as demonstrated by the example of water collection, whereby every household requires their own individual rope to draw water. Those without such a facility, such as C07, are forced to beg from neighbours to use their ropes, wells and draught power to collect water on a regular basis. *Shura* treasurer and head of Household C02 explained that such disunity was a major barrier to the formation of a farmers’ cooperative, with all its potential benefits.

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with Household Head B07.

### *Social connections*

Given the importance of social connections in achieving economic security, it is unsurprising that households go to great lengths to create and preserve such connections. Such connections are likely to be understated in interviews, in part due to their informal nature. On a day-to-day level, this is often expressed as maintaining positive connections locally, as Household A06 said, “I always advise my daughter-in-law not to reject someone if they come to our house and ask for something we have, and behave well with the neighbours.” She went on to explain how she maintains good relations with a *bai* in the city, by having her sons regularly deliver him dung and firewood which is then reciprocated with gifts of food and clothes.

Household B06, as previously mentioned, has developed multiple and durable help relationships through providing free services with the head’s skills as a cobbler and builder. In one instance, this resulted in B06 acquiring free labour (*ashar*) many years later from the individual described below:

His father is a famous man. He came [for Friday prayers] and tried to fasten his donkey to my house. I gave some straw to his donkey, and gave him some tea and food. The next week...he brought me some firewood...in this way we became friends.

Similarly, Household B08 cares for the elderly and ailing mother of a famous local commander, with strategic benefits stated for land inheritance from that family. Household B02 has a long history of developing and consolidating social relations through regularly hosting guests, though this household has been less successful in drawing on these connections at the time of widespread economic decline, due to its head’s reputation as a wealthy and self-sufficient man.

The concept of *wasita*, referring to a social connection that can exert influence or access resources or services on one’s behalf, is an important characteristic social capital. Many examples of *wasita* were given by respondents regarding work and resource access, as previously mentioned. However, what is more distinct about *wasita* is that it often forms part of client-patron relationships, highlighting certain obligations that wealthier individuals have to certain poorer ones based on the nature of their relationship. Widow A06, who, as previously mentioned, lost her husband when then-commander, head of Household A02 send her husband to war in place of his own relative, was recently assisted in obtaining a widow’s pension card.

There are many families of martyrs in the village...but [A02] only helped me to get a pension card. I don’t know why he helped only me—either he felt sorry for me or he wanted to save his money. I can’t lie to you. Every Ramazan before that, he offered me something like tea, cooking oil and flour.

Because of the guilt or indebtedness felt, A02 characterised his social relation to her in terms of these perceived obligations, expressed through charity and *wasita*. In patronage relationships, the status of the benefits that accrue to the client are not guaranteed. The son of Household C06, for example, worked four out of a six-month wage labouring contract for a local patron before taking up an opportunity to go to Iran with a local smuggler. He was not paid at all, having failed to complete the contract, and was powerless to challenge the decision.

The benefits to the individual acting in *wasita* are not always immediately apparent, and may be simply represent a favour to be called on later. Larger, wealthier households emphasise the drawbacks of their status in terms of expectations placed on them in terms of providing credit and charity to others, and in cases such as B01, being *mardumdar* or socially well connected, and therefore having to host large wedding parties with many guests when one of their children marries. The head of household B02, who can also

be described as *mardumdar*, complains of how his reputation has outlasted his actual wealth, given the impacts of drought on his livelihood, and the severe injury of his son. Drawing parallels with another formerly well-known man in the village, he said, “He died in poverty, and did not even have a shroud to cover him, but his name, still when people are speaking about him is *bai*.” Contrary to Household A06, Household B02 applied for a state pension from the same office due to his son’s injury, but was told that the lists were full. Given that the household is often not given a share of aid that comes to the village, as he is perceived as not needy, it is clear that reputation alone does not ensure *wasita*, and can in fact be a burden, particularly in times of economic depression.

Not having *wasita* is often given by households for not being able to avail of opportunities and to influence decision-makers. This is illustrated most clearly in Household A05’s divorce case. “The villagers were telling me that I am mad, as the guy has got *wasita* and I am a poor man. They said my case would not get anywhere.” Indeed, without *wasita*, the household was forced to borrow around 120,000 Afs to pursue their case through the formal, but nonetheless corrupt, channels. Numerous households spoke very negatively about *bais* in their village who appropriated the aid that they themselves needed more, particularly in Village C. One respondent, the head of Household A07, was particularly resentful, saying, “I hate *bais*...God has made them *bais*, and they should give charity and alms. If they don’t, all their wealth is *haram*.” As is discussed further in Section 6, however, poorer households spoke positively about greater equity among their communities during the era of Taliban control. *Wasita* is therefore reflective of the current social order, and is by no means a permanent social resource. It is dependent on political factors, changes in economic fortune and the maintaining of strategic social relations.

## 5.5 Social and gender norms

The concept of *siyaldari* is useful in explaining many of the social norms described by respondents in terms of a range of scenarios, from utilising services such as health and education facilities, to interactions between individual households in a more regular sense. Referring to the strong bond between close relatives or *qawm*, *siyaldari* also implies a type of competition, in both positive and negative senses, in terms of personal choices related to demonstrating solidarity and adhering to social norms. For example in Village A, as previously mentioned, school attendance for girls was rare, and the majority of respondents mentioned that their decision was dependent on others, particularly elders, leading the way. It was often said that if girls were sent to school, the household would be said to have “had an extra daughter,” implying that they would be viewed as wealthier than they were. This unspoken rivalry, demonstrated by self-conscious behaviours, is a key element in defining and maintaining local social norms, reinforcing the need for conformity to maintain social inclusion and the scope that households have to make genuinely independent decisions.

However, such norms are still subject to change and evolution. Women’s liberties with regard to public life and movement were said to have increased in all the study villages, for a variety of reasons. Household C02, telling a story of a woman who was flogged for running away from an unhappy marriage, alluded to the improvement in women’s decision-making position on a macro level of political regime change. “She was unwise. If she were in this time, she could reject her husband and leave her husband’s house, but at that time (under *arbab* rule) it was very difficult.” Some respondents explained liberal social changes resulting from democracy, such as the wife of Household A03:

[Smiling] Democracy has reached here as well and such matters (co-habitation before marriage) aren’t considered a disgrace as much as it was in the past. Ten years ago such an event put us to shame among the community [here in Village

A] while it was normal among [Village B] people. But now, look at us! Now our girls carry babies in their bellies to their new houses while [Village B] girls go to their new houses with a 1- or 2-year-old baby in their arms!

There is some evidence that hardship and necessity results in such norms being challenged too. To some extent, lack of access to aid and lack of social cohesion are a driving force for change, as widowed household with migrated sons, C05, said:

Before, women couldn't leave the house but nowadays people are afraid of the [democratic] government and don't say anything. Now the mullah also said on the loudspeaker to people not to let women go out of their homes or to the city because on the Day of Judgment they will ask you why you did this as it is against Sharia. But the people didn't accept this. If the mullah would bring food, clothes for my child, sugar and everything we need, as now my husband is not with me, then I would accept his idea!

Widow A06, due to her lifecycle position with married adult children similarly reported more personal freedom and said, "[I have] free will for going wherever I would like to go. I feel I am like a man for going out, I mean I go alone to bazaar to do shopping, then I carry it to the car and get back home by myself." Education and income-generating opportunities provided through courses for women in Village B are acknowledged to be catalysts of this social change, giving those women able to benefit from them more bargaining power in the home. The daughter-in-law of widow Household B08, for example, explained that she is effectively able to make family planning decisions as a result of her now-significant contributions to household income. "If my husband and I quarrel, I will not worry about this. Because I want to do something to earn money. And if I have more children then I cannot do this." The longer-lasting effects of such social changes are not yet evident. Women who reported working during periods of displacement did not appear to have gained any longer-lasting economic or personal freedom upon return to the village. One positive factor cited by respondents who migrated to Pakistan was the ability of women to work in brickfields and contribute to the household income. Indeed, this is a significant "pull factor" for those that returned there, such as some members of Household B06, therefore effectively circumventing *siyaldari* and local social constraints.

One particular woman, the 60-year-old mother of the head of the *shura* in Village B, provided a unique case of a woman having gained exceptional and unchallenged personal freedom through a combination of personality, history and social standing. The woman, whose *baqali* work during wartime was so important to the displaced community, and who worked in the recent past as an employee of an international organisation, travels regularly by herself to Kabul, Iran and Pakistan to visit relatives, and is a source of awe for other women in the village. A woman in her extended family said, "No other woman in the village is like her. She is the only woman who can go wherever she wants... she is like a man," adding, "Whenever she walks in the street, the men call her *azarbab* (landlord)." The factors which allow this particular woman to transcend a number of cultural barriers clearly do not apply to the majority however. A female respondent of Household C06, appearing to speak for the majority in conservative Village C, said

The head (of the *shura*) tells us we have no permission to leave the village just to work somewhere outside, even if we died of hunger... They know better what is OK and what is not. I do not see the ability of making such a decision by myself.

## 5.6 Prospects for Recovery

The multiple shocks and stresses experienced by households as well as whole villages have led to coping responses that have longer-term consequences for livelihood recovery.

Harvests in Sayyad District in 2009 following the winter and spring precipitation that broke the drought clearly were not on the bumper scale that is recorded nationally in Sayyad District. As many farmers lacked the labour and means to afford inputs to cultivate usual amounts of seeds, if at all, agricultural recovery will take a number of years and will be dependent on numerous factors. A significant limitation is widespread debt. Asked whether levels of food consumption and quality had returned to “normal” following the rains, Household B04 said, “If we were not still in debt, then we would have made many changes, and we would eat like in the past.” As mentioned previously, debt repayments and maintaining the support relationships that they represent are a clear priority for households post-crisis. Selling land as a coping strategy to meet immediate needs during drought undoubtedly has a significant impact. B07 is one such household to resort to this measure of selling a key productive asset, impoverishing the household in the mid- to long-term as it reduces self-provisioning. Many households also sold land to meet large social costs such as funerals and bride prices which may not have been necessary under more favourable ecological and economic circumstances. It is worth mentioning too that land left fallow during the drought invariably hardened without regular ploughing, according to many farmers, leading to challenging soil conditions in which to recommence farming.

The impacts of drought responses on human capital will be felt in the long term. Early marriages of daughters and school drop outs are two clear examples of these effects on the younger generation, who will be less likely to escape a cycle of poverty. Households that opted for the earlier marriage of their daughters forfeited higher bride prices given for older brides, meaning households have had to effectively trade future benefits and consumption for immediate needs. Earlier marriage statistically exposes women to greater maternal health risks through bearing, on average, more children. Further, the chances of becoming widowed are high due to often large age differences between the bride and groom.<sup>61</sup> The duration of international migration, which intensified under drought conditions, remains to be seen. Migrants may enter into exploitative contracts that bind them to stay, or indeed elect to stay abroad for various reasons.

As such a widespread phenomenon, the impacts of these responses on longer-term vulnerability on those remaining in the village are likely to be numerous. This may include lack of labour and local income-earning capacity, as well as the potential for family unit breakdown, as seen in instances where men have been injured, killed or otherwise not returned.

Existing responses outlined in this section are limited in their potential to enable households to recover fully or advance economically in response to livelihood shocks. Particular migration strategies and longer-term impoverishment created by asset sales, early marriage, debt and over-reliance on social resources erode household resources, increase mid-term risk and uncertainty, and leave many households vulnerable to subsequent shocks. All households in the study have suffered from the effects of these outcomes and responses in the absence of significant external and macro-level support. The next section turns to the role of various formal, informal and social institutions in shaping livelihood outcomes. It argues that formal institutions at various levels, overlapping with informal institutions in a sometimes dysfunctional and exclusionary manner, have failed to provide much in the way of sustained livelihood support. Rather, social institutions such as the family, by contrast, have offered the strongest and most immediate means to reduce risk and achieve longer-term economic security.

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61 *NRVA 2007/8*, 13.



## 6. The Role of Politics and Institutions

This section focuses on a key question of concern to the study: the extent to which formal and informal local structures and institutions have shaped livelihood trajectories to date and their effectiveness in creating conditions that are conducive to strengthened livelihoods.

### 6.1 National and provincial government

Perceptions of the effectiveness and responsiveness of formal government structures at the national and provincial levels have changed over time, and relate partly to the different experiences of such structures and their policies at the household level. Whilst relative prevailing security and democracy naturally are appreciated, households reported a general frustration at the slow pace of development, under-investment in the local area and unresponsiveness of government, particularly at the provincial level. The more turbulent politics and undemocratic policies of the past, while at times violent and arbitrary, offered more favourable outcomes for certain people at certain times based on ethnicity, social standing and household structure.

During the Afghan-Soviet War, those who could not or did not wish to migrate in some cases actually experienced a period of relative prosperity. Households B05 and B07 report ample land available for sharecropping as well as cheap oxen, enabling Household B05 to even purchase land with the profits he made from large harvests at the time. Opportunities for hired farmers and labourers were numerous too on account of widespread out-migration. Despite the many risks involved, households who worked as *askaris* or conscripted soldiers at the time were also paid relatively well, particularly those who served for more than the minimum number of years, such as A03. These men reported being able to, upon return, afford marriage as well as land, which was relatively cheap during and post-conflict. Looting, beating and harassment were widespread threats to personal security during the two periods of conflict, and the direct threats to individual households dependent very much on social standing, identity and structure in terms of the age and gender. Some community leaders such as Household C02 were pressured by warring factions to remain in the village so that the community at large would also remain and provide for the militants. Others, such as the majority of Household A02, fled the village for fear of conscription and reprisal for their well-known pro-government affiliations.

Experiences of the Taliban regime were also mixed, and personal. A number of households speak positively about this period, particularly in terms of equitable dispute resolution and the ability of the Taliban to resolve the water conflict, at least temporarily, with upstream villages. Household B05, despite explaining that he had to pay for the protection of the militants at the time said, “In this time our life was good and all the commanders tried to hide themselves. The heads of the strong people were under their wings. There was no *wasita*.” Household C02 agreed that though arbitrary and brutal, the Taliban’s actions to resolve the water dispute in favour of the lower-catchment villages acted as a deterrent to those who had been violating traditional agreements. A01 said, “When the Taliban were here they didn’t drink so much as a glass of water from us, because they said this village is poor and people are in a bad way. They had good behaviour with us.” Others did not have such positive experiences. Household B02, with his reputation for being wealthy and hosting many people, had his home occupied by the Taliban: “Since the time of the Taliban regime our livelihoods began to decline...we had a lot of wheat at that time, and they took all of our wheat and redistributed it among the people.” Others reported pre-emptively selling livestock and assets so as to avoid theft and appropriation.

Security under the Taliban regime was to a large degree ethnically contingent. For this reason, as one Pashtun elder from Village C explained, he was approached by the head of the Arab section of the village to become the settlement's temporary leader, in order that the village would not be targeted.<sup>62</sup> He refused this responsibility, saying, "I told them that we [Pashtuns] are with you and nobody can harm you." The ethnically Arab Household C08 explained that their motivations for migration at that time were more dependent on economic factors (the drought of 1998-99) and the risks of collateral danger from the fighting: "Uzbeks fled their villages because they were frightened of the Taliban, while we had no reason to be afraid of them. We left the village for Pakistan just because of the fighting." It was the residents of Village B, as the district centre, that suffered the most during both of these periods of conflict, and from where most displacement occurred.

The irony of there being economic security without peace during the mujahiddin period, and peace without economic security at present has not escaped some of the respondents.<sup>63</sup> While peace as a condition attributed to the new regime was widely praised, the central government remains distant to the lives of most. In talking about government, it is apparent that most respondents had hopes that the government would support them, but no real expectations. This feeling comes through in A01's statement, "God help the government to provide us with some aid, otherwise we have no power over the government to help us." Furthermore, expectations of the government are often expressed with reference to prior experience. Many in Village A referred to the Karzai government and the northern Junbesh Party synonymously, with others stating needs for state industry and market interventionism that were experienced during the reign of leaders such as Dr Najibullah (May 1986-April 1992). The majority of respondents, when speaking of their participation in the 2009 elections, mentioned that voting choices were now more individual and independent than previous elections. However, many who voted did so with the hope of getting aid with their voter registration cards, as they did with their UNHCR registration cards upon return to the country in 2002-3. Misunderstanding of the process and low literacy levels leave people open to manipulation by agents acting on behalf of political candidates, as C06 said:

Before the first election some people came to the village and wrote our names down and collected our voting cards, and they told us, 'Someone will provide some assistance and bring a car to you, as well. So we gave votes for him and now I am waiting for my car. I said to my father. "I don't know if you will be alive or dead [by then], but I believe no one is going to bring to us a car." He regretted his vote and I do too.

Most do not feel that they can access government or petition for its intervention where needed. Having identified the beams and stone foundations of his house in the possession of those who appropriated them while he was in Pakistan, B06 said, "What's the use of complaining? The government is not active here. Perhaps it is active in some other places, but not here in [Village B]." Even the *shura* treasurer, C02, was unwilling to seek justice through formal systems with his own personal dispute relating to his son's death, allegedly caused by a girl pushing him into a well. "I am myself in government (i.e. the NSP *shura*). I know nothing will happen if I refer to government," at least until things change, as he went on to explain, "When the right time arrives and the government listens to my case and take it into consideration, sure I will take measures in this relation." However, perhaps due to its relative distance from the local authorities in Village B and lower capacity of the *shura* in Village C, certain respondents have looked more toward higher-level government in resolving disputes. Asked why her husband did

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62 Key informant interview, Pashtun elder, Village C.

63 Male focus group discussion, Village A.

not take his land dispute to the *woliswal* or provincial courts, C03 responded:

Because there is no justice here. Who could we complain to? No one would even unfold your petition here. No one would listen to you here. This is why we petitioned in Kabul. After a few days, a delegation came to the village and solved it. We got back our land after that.

Provincial level government is seen as particularly corrupt and ineffective, being filled with “wolves” and the “same old commanders,” in the words one community elder in Village A. The *shura* head also made clear that “people are not happy with the government because the government officials take bribes from people and do not do any work for people without bribery. If I go to any government office for any type of work they will ask me for money.” It is at this level that interaction with government bodies is most problematic and expensive, without influence, as Household A05’s divorce case shows. The case was escalated to provincial courts by the village elders of both Village A and B who were unable to resolve the matter. The resulting delays and bribes were significant, according to the household, who allege that half of the 600,000 Af\$ they borrowed to pay the compensation that was ruled to their daughter’s ex-husband was taken by the courts. Even the community elders faced problems with government responsiveness in relation to requests for village development. Village B *shura* head, B01 described a failed petition to get electricity installed in Village B:

The Minister from the Ministry of Water and Energy approved our suggestion, but when we arrived to the Sar-i-Pul provincial governor’s office, they made some obstacles to supplying the electricity for [Village B]. They said we do not have a budget for supplying the electricity to [Village B]. I think they just did not want to help us and they made excuses.

The provincial authority is therefore seen as a bottleneck to successful interaction with government, and an entity to be wary of. Household B02 for example, was urged not to take his land claim dispute there by the elders, who were concerned that the uncertain documentation status of most of the villagers land would then be brought into question. The treasurer of the *shura* in Village C felt that as part of a larger corrupt system, there is a kind of market failure in which honest behaviour is disincentivised or even unattainable. “There is no *halal* money, no way; however much you try not to have any *haram* money mixed with your money. Even if you have come from heaven, it is impossible to remain clean (avoid corruption).”

## 6.2 Local governance

As the arbitrators of most local disputes, village elders in the three study villages play a significant role in reinforcing social and cultural norms and maintaining existing power structures. Processes are often open to interference by influential people, as in the case of A05’s divorce issue, where a powerful individual from Village B effectively disrupted the elders’ consensus to approve it. Both the *shuras* and the *woliswal* are seen as often acting in the interests of powerful parties, as B06 said:

Who will listen to us? They only listen to the *bai* and *wasitadar* (powerful) people. The *woliswal* collects some people from the village—*bai* people—to come to the *woliswali* to discuss matters, and these discussions always end in agreement between the *woliswal* and the *bai* people. End of discussion.

The example of a powerful individual in Village A being arrested four times for an offence, and each time bribing police for his release only to be re-arrested at the command of the *woliswal* serves to confirm this dysfunction to the villagers. While it can be seen as positive that most local disputes in all three villages are handled at the local level, the type of justice administered seems rarely to strengthen the asset security and property

rights of the poor.

Many respondents reported that challenging decisions is taboo, particularly as decisions are said to be grounded in Sharia law. Avoiding confrontation and animosity within the family or *qawm* also deters people from bringing their complaints to elders, given how vital such help relations are. As the wife of C08 said, “a well mannered person who respects their community never complains.” In the case of her own refugee card being appropriated by *shura* treasurer C02 for his own personal gain, her reaction illustrates how she would rather forego justice in order not to jeopardise harmonious relations with powerful people.

Researcher: Could you not complain to the head of *shura* even?

C08: No! He is the elder of the village and the *qawm*. He is a *qawm* member and it is not OK to challenge his reputation by doing so.

Neighbour: He might be helpful sometime in the future!

The fact that the *shura* and elders are entities that reproduce local power relations therefore affects the extent to which equitable outcomes are achieved. In many ways, the elders constitute a key institution that reinforces conservative social norms. This was evident particularly with attitudes to girls' education, with many respondents in Village A in particular saying that they would send their own daughters to school if the elders did first. The potential for women in particular to question the decisions of authority and claim entitlements to public goods is limited by such norms. Women entitled to land and property inheritance are often pressured by their families not to claim their rights, but rather give their land to their brothers. The fact that land disputes seem often to be resolved according to conservative norms, and often against female complainants, acts as one deterrent for women to take their claim further. The wife of Household B04 for example lost her rightfully inherited share of her father's land to an uncle. After her husband was arbitrarily arrested in the dispute, the elders placated the uncle by granting him three-quarters of disputed land. More direct judgements of character, according to a neighbour of Household B06, are made against women who try to challenge the status quo.

If I went to them, the elders would say that I am not a good woman, and say, “She is a *jangira* (‘fighter’) woman.” The elders decide everything among themselves; they are not looking out for the poor people. Our pleas mean nothing to them! When fertilised seed was given out by the government in aid, I went and cried out to them, “Please give me one sack of wheat seed!” Again it was said that I was not a good woman.

An important presumed benefit of CDC *shuras* is their ability to channel aid in a more pro-poor way based on their knowledge of local need. Evidence from the study households challenges the extent to which this actually happens, with personal relationships with *shura* members often being important in accessing benefits. Though often explained in terms of being “active” or “clever,” those who do petition effectively for aid are often those who maintain certain connections and reputations. Disabled cobbler B06 admitted freely to being given aid not designated for him, either through lying to external distributing authorities or through carefully cultivated relationships:

They didn't want to give me fertiliser, but as you know [the head of B01] is the boss. I have done good things for him, and I referred to him and said, “I have nothing.” I insisted. Finally, he wrote my name down. It was for rain-fed land but he gave it to me anyway. I sold it and ate (from the proceeds).

Household B06 captures this *wasita* with a saying, “If you have *muraba* (someone who cares about you) you can eat *murabi* (jam, i.e. good things).” Household A08 is lent

money directly from the *shura*'s NSP funding due to his family connection with the head of the *shura*, A02, while others with direct relationships who do complain or petition are sometimes compensated or promised aid and resources at a later date. In this way, some households in Village C are able to claim the rights of WFP Food-for-Work labourer opportunities of absent villagers, against the policy of the programme. All those who did not benefit from *shura* mediated NGO programmes blamed their lack of connections. Connections act as both a source of information as well as facilitating direct aid allocation, as some complained aid had been distributed before they came to know about it, with one widow saying that as she has no husband to attend the mosque, she is never informed even about development projects targeted at women.

### 6.3 Aid access and delivery

External aid in the study villages, as mentioned in the village overviews in Section 1, has largely been limited to WFP Food-for-Work and Food-for-Education programmes, and NSP infrastructural projects implemented by ZOA Refugee Care. A teacher training programme run by Save the Children was also reported to benefit some teachers in the district.<sup>64</sup> Aid, as mentioned previously, favours Village B as the district centre in terms of allocation, and access in general is determined, somewhat problematically at times, by local institutions like the CDC *shuras*.

Though corruption and mismanagement is alleged at all levels of the aid delivery system, there are certain undeniable supply side issues affecting the study villages. The *shuras* of Villages A and B complain of official under-numeration in official population figures used by NSP, which do not account for large scale return migration. A02 for example estimates that in neighbouring Village B there are over 1,000 households, compared to around 300 actually registered by the NSP. The distribution of insufficient aid therefore poses problems for local authorities. For example, during the period of most acute hunger in summer 2008, the *woliswal* was accused of capturing food aid. According to him, however, the aid received was inadequate to distribute equitably and in a way that would not cause disagreements between communities, therefore rendering him unable to do so. The head of Village C's *shura* also found himself in a similar situation:

We have not divided the fodder (received as emergency aid) among the people. We wonder to whom we should give. It is very difficult to divide 40 sacks of fodder among the whole village.

Realising that aid can be a divisive agent capable of disrupting local social cohesion, local authorities are often wary of distributing aid to some and not others. For this reason Household B01 explained that the elders in that village decided to distribute aid received recently to all households equally rather than targeting only poor households, who may otherwise be subject to resentment by other sections of the community.

Aid intended as "pro-poor" may not reach its intended recipients for a number of reasons. Owing to the effects of the drought and certain adaptive strategies undertaken at the household level, poorer households have become less able to make claims to aid. For example, men who migrate lose their entitlement to household allocations of Food-for-Work employment opportunities, while women facing resulting increased domestic and income-generating work burdens are less able to attend compensated literacy courses in Village B, as the example given in Section 2 of the woman who dropped out of the course demonstrated. The wife of B02, who manages to attend, said to this effect:

If the courses did not provide money then my husband would not allow me to attend. Other women would not attend the course either...they would

<sup>64</sup> Key informant interview, District Education Department, 27 January 2009.



say that their housework remains, and that they only come to the course because they are needy.

Similarly, households who took children out of school before their final exams forfeited the entire school-year's worth of food aid. Recipients are open to exploitation at various stages, for example being charged a delivery fee of 20 Afs for the WFP Food-for-Work wheat by the *shura* in Village C, and being told by political agents in the same village prior to the election that aid had been donated by General Dostum.

As mentioned, mediating institutions such as the CDC *shuras* form part of broad social and power relations that condition the access of groups and individuals to such resources. Public goods created by external aid, such as the clinic in Village B, are also nested in these broader power dynamics, both between individuals and villages. The wife of Household A05 was one of many households from her village to complain of being denied service or being provided with sub-standard service at the clinic. After many patients were seen before her, she recounted how a soldier laughed, “‘Bibi jan, they don’t care about people like you!’ Therefore I decided to leave the clinic immediately and not come back while that person was still working there. That’s why I don’t go anymore.” She was further denied service on another occasion when attempting to buy medicines from the clinic’s pharmacy.

I think I would be taken care of better if I was from Village B. I got upset because that man shut [the door] on me and told me that he wouldn’t give me the medication until all the other clients were given. Finally I got tired and came back home without getting the medication.

The clinic in Village B is managed and staffed largely by a very large and influential local family.<sup>65</sup> Though the services are free, a number of respondents reported giving *shirini*<sup>66</sup> to the clinic staff for services they received, reflecting the caution with which people treat extensions of such important local power, even where such services are intended to be public goods. In this way, as well as through the CDC *shura*-distributed aid, poorer households’ dependence on local elites is further reinforced.

## 6.4 Markets

Markets rarely function to the benefit of the poor and respondents perceived them to be a major source of risk. At harvest time for example, when debts are expected to be repaid, wheat prices are at their lowest, while during times of severe and widespread economic stress households are unable to find buyers for livestock and land sold under distress. Similarly in a good year when households may wish to invest in livestock with surplus, the prices of livestock often rise above what is affordable for most. As already described, households go to great lengths to try to protect themselves from dependence on markets for food through stocking in the summer months, but can do little else to act strategically around seasonal market price changes. Changes in labour rates and purchasing power in Pakistan were considered carefully by many making migratory decisions, such as Household C08, who due to higher food prices in 2008-9 decided instead to sharecrop locally rather than risk dependence on market income sources at an inopportune time. Over the longer term, inflation and changes in market prices were mentioned as a major force constraining the livelihoods of the poor. The kinds of economic and political conditions that allowed orphaned household head B07 to climb out of poverty and accumulate land and property through contracted labour clearly no longer exist. This was in part due to political policies but certainly also because land was much cheaper at the time when many currently poor households acquired their holdings.

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65 This household was interviewed as part of the original 20-household sample.

66 A “sweetener,” or payment to gain favour from the recipient.

Household B05 emphasised this by stating that the price of the land they bought many years ago is now the same as the market price for a single goat.

Markets for locally produced products demonstrate a longer recovery period from supply shock than those with larger and more numerous sources, such as food markets. Markets for local seed and fodder therefore did not respond as quickly as food and labour markets to the passing of the drought and record food prices. Consequently, households continued to struggle in the medium term to sustain their remaining livestock and to recommence farming given the prohibitive cost of locally appropriate seed varieties which were significantly depleted during the drought.

Though exclusionary at times for some, markets can be resilient and adaptable in the face of disruptions, providing some measure of protection for those able to engage in them. Markets did not fail during conflict as some might have assumed, creating opportunities for *baqali* for younger and older men as well as some women, who were not at risk from conscription, to transport goods between urban centres and areas where displaced populations were. However, markets that were formerly profitable for the poor in Sayyad District, for example *gillim* and other crafts, have failed either due to drought-induced supply-chain collapse and falling demand, or due to longer-term factors and adaptations to livelihoods that make such market engagement unprofitable or impossible.

## 6.5 The family and marriage

As explained by Pain,<sup>67</sup> the family can be conceived as a crucial social institution, affording the strongest and most immediate welfare and security, in a context of historical distance from the state, and physical insecurity arising from conflict. Evidence suggests that the institution of the family, presently as well as historically, has been able to deliver social welfare and economic security to a greater degree than markets, state and informal institutions, albeit on a micro-scale. Marriage, therefore, is a critical practice through which the social reproduction of the family occurs, and one that highlights the importance of the family as an institution within wider societal institutions such as *qawm* and community.

The majority of respondents expressed a preference for marrying within the family, or *qawm*, for many reasons, but particularly for the reinforcement of social and tribal networks and the economic security this offers. Practically, the option is often cheaper in terms of lower bride price, or exchange-marriage arrangements. The wife of Household B03 spelled this out clearly:

I am very happy with this marriage, because through marriage we can extend and fasten our relations with others, therefore we can get some cooking oil, tea, flour or bread by credit whenever we need.

The wife of Household C05 talked about *qawm* members as being “like different organs of the same body,” explaining that, “If we marry within our relatives we will become close to each other, otherwise my son will become unknown and my relatives will not support him.” As such, marriage is seen as a key method through which to ensure continued material support through extended family networks. Keeping key households assets within the family through bride price and inheritance has clear advantages. Further, fear that a fall out or disagreement would have serious implications for a household’s economy is an important factor behind the choice to marry relatives. Maintaining harmony within the *qawm* and family is therefore crucial, as is having the reputation of doing so, as C05 continued, “If we don’t select a girl from his father’s family then all the villagers will

67 Adam Pain, “Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories: Evidence from Badakhshan” (Kabul: AREU, 2010).

say that he doesn't have a good relationship with that family."

As mentioned in Smith's study on marriage practices,<sup>68</sup> marriage choices for children is a key domain within the household over which women have influence, as the head of Household A07 said, "My wife had a role and she was satisfied. It is impossible to make the marriage decision if your wife is not happy with it." Mothers are often those to identify or approve of brides, and according to many interviews are successful in negotiating their preferred outcomes. A03 told the story of her son's marriage, which was resisted by part of the in-law's family:

The bride's paternal relatives argued with the bride's mother that they did not agree with this marriage, although the mother insisted that she would give her daughter to us. Finally the mother won the battle! Because she warned them she would leave her husband's house if they didn't hear her voice.

Although stated in a focus group discussion,<sup>69</sup> there was less evidence in interviews of brides themselves having more say in their marriages than in the past.

The economic dimension to the transaction of marriage, given the high cost of bride-price (the highest average is in Village A, at around 150-200,000 Afs), is obviously significant in shaping livelihood strategies. Over the study's period of focus, marriages were generally reported to have become later for all men, who faced the challenge of raising such a sum, and for most women except for girls from the poorest households, who experienced early marriages. The female head of household A07, for example, reported "selling" daughters due to economic stress and lack of alternatives: "Last winter the weather got very cold and we had nothing at home, so I engaged my daughter at that time. I got her engaged just because of the cold weather." Her husband also explained the decision in economic terms, stating, "I had no money to feed my other children."

Given the cultural pressures for men to raise their bride prices on time, generally said to be in around three years, engaging daughters is a relatively strong strategy for ensuring a regular income over a fixed period. For many, given the widely acknowledged disadvantages of marrying young, early marriage is far down the "coping sequence." As B07 said, "I will sell my land and fulfil my needs from that money and then I'll marry my daughters, but it is the last option." Attitudes toward exchange marriages, where bride price payments are not necessary, are sometimes very negative. Indeed, brides married through this means are less valued and often mistreated. The wife of Household B02 said,

My sons have said to their father, "If you decide on an exchange marriage then it would be better for our sisters if you put a pillow on their faces and killed them!" [My son] dislikes the idea of an exchange; he thinks it is a bad idea for both families.

Overall, however, marriage continues to offer significant social and economic benefits, in the short term for the bride's family and in the longer term for potentially eventually increasing social, human and physical capital.

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68 D.J. Smith, "Decisions, Desires and Diversity: Marriage Practices in Afghanistan" (Kabul, AREU: 2009).

69 Village B, women's focus group discussion, 19 November 2008.

## 7. Conclusions: Opportunities to Support Livelihoods

This study demonstrates significant livelihood stress and deterioration in welfare conditions across all households in all wealth groups in Sar-i-Pul. The decline for many was driven largely the impacts of the recent drought, following high levels of food costs, repatriation and environmental pressures. Though wealthier households suffered most visibly in terms of large-scale asset sales and losses, it was the poorer households that suffered most severely. Vulnerability for these households was created predominantly by lack of male labour, severely limited diversification options, high dependency ratios, lack of voice and social resources, and landlessness.

The findings may mirror outcomes for communities in similar agro-ecological zones, characterised by geographical and market isolation, irregular rain-fed production and a lack of external aid and support. This study outlined major livelihood and welfare outcomes, including widespread debt, food insecurity and consumption reduction and reliance on regional and international labour markets to compensate for failed harvests. These practices have multiple knock-on effects for future resilience within the study households. Given the nature of migration that has taken place, high average levels of debt and economic obstacles to recommencing farming, livelihood recovery in the absence of support is likely to take some time. Resilience to future shocks, given the nature of coping responses available to study respondents, is likely to take even more time to build up in the absence of support.

As mentioned throughout the report, social resources play a crucial role in determining access to support, enabling successful outcomes in transactions with formal and informal institutions and defining to a great extent the response and livelihood strategy options available to households. Local social support mechanisms, operating through social connections and cultural norms, are strong and have clear and immediate benefits for households, such as the impressive reach and resilience of local credit and charity systems. These resources afforded households a much greater degree of protection in the recent drought than other formal institutions such as government, aid or markets. This is seen not just in terms of tangible deliverables and income derived from formal and informal institutions, but the extent to which social resources enable many people to access other forms of support through them. Though durable and long established, social resources are not, however, inexhaustable, nor does their utilisation result in socially equitable outcomes for all, as shown by the example of aid allocation in the study villages. As discussed in Section 3, such support mechanisms are necessarily grounded in local relationships of power. Either overtly or subtly, over-reliance on such resources for income security are through terms that very often disadvantage the poor. While people choose or are compelled to draw on social relations, which are often developed strategically over long periods of time, these relations are limited in the extent to which they offer poor people a realistic escape from poverty in the long term.

Though livelihoods in Sar-i-Pul are not, and have not been, exclusively agriculturally based, the study findings emphasise the importance of subsistence agriculture to the reduction of market-derived risk, as well as to the rural economy at large. Small-holder farming in Sayyad, as elsewhere, is not only based on the production of wheat; crops such as melon and sesame, in good years, are also instrumental in achieving food security. However, the scope for the intensification and commercialisation in more remote, mountainous zones is clearly limited, and there is a need for market-based approaches to fully appreciate the importance of subsistence-farming practices to rural livelihoods. Given well-founded aversion to market risk, particularly among poorer households. In order to address structural vulnerabilities to climatic shocks and improve the livelihood security offered through farming, an integrated approach to

rural development is necessary in order to improve agricultural infrastructure, equity of water and natural resource access, and to strengthen the bargaining position of farmers.

Off-farm labour strategies, including international migration, intensified under drought, but are nevertheless long-standing and important components of rural livelihoods in Sayyad. They therefore need not be seen as problematic or at all times reflecting desperation, though migrants to urban areas and international destinations require support to prevent exploitation and reduce some of the many risks that certain migratory patterns entail. Sustainable rural job creation is fundamental in improving livelihood security. The current capacity of labour markets to deliver economic security, as evidenced particularly by landless labouring households in Village C, is insufficient. With demographics, structural institutions and varying degrees of social resources often determining access, markets are not accessible to all equally.

Evidence from the study strongly emphasises the importance of women's existing income-generating work in household food security, particularly in cases where men have migrated. Among poorer households, the intensification of spinning wool as a primary means by which to achieve day-to-day food security, although increasing women's burden of work, has proven to be an extremely important contribution to household welfare. Given the propensity of many women in the study to diligently reinvest modest profits in similar activities with marginally higher returns, there is clearly scope to work with existing skills and markets to achieve welfare gains. Where short-term market failure has occurred, for example the lapse in visits from wool traders due to supply problems, it is possible that interventions to strengthen supply chains like these at the core of daily livelihoods can be made. At the very least, it is important to acknowledge that with domestic and non-paid work burdens increased by migration, time is already a scarce resource for many women, particularly in periods of economic hardship. To achieve sustainable benefits, activities targetting women should therefore be based on market research and an appreciation of local livelihood systems and better still, integrated more into mainstream economic development rather than being isolated initiatives.



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Annex 1. Village A households

Household	Wealth group	Size	M/F head age	Wives	Male labour (aged 15+)	Rain-fed / Irrigated land owned (jieribs)	Food sufficiency	Livestock (change)	Migration destination (number)	Debt (Af\$)	Trajectory, Notes
A01	I	16	78/65	1	3	20/2	720 sers consumption (normal harvest 6 months)	3 cattle (-1) 50 sheep (-150) 1 donkey (-1)	Iran (2) Mazar (1)	10,000	Steep relative decline. Large livestock sales and migration of 3 sons.
A02	I	18	50/38	3	2	40/4	540 sers consumption (7-8 months normal harvest, 5-6 months bad, 2-3 years good)	1 cattle (-1) 25 sheep (-45) 2 donkey (-1)	Mazar (2)	25,000	Slight decline. Sold land for 70,000 Af\$ in 2006, but also bought plot. Currently many dependents.
A03	II	11	48/45	1	4	25/-	200 sers consumption (normal harvest sufficient, 2-3 months bad)	0 cattle (-3) 2 sheep (-4)	Iran (1) Mazar (2)	70,000	3-year decline driven by health shock and large debts. Farm jointly with brother, harvest used to repay debts.
A04	II	5	50/30	1	1	25/-	150 sers (normal sufficient, good cash crop sales)	1 cattle (-2) 0 sheep (-10) 0 donkey (-1)	Iran (1)	none	Gradual decline from previous generation, sharper since poppy ban. Land farmed jointly. Now depend on remittance.
A05	III	9	80/57	1	3	-/-	Transient food insecurity	2 donkeys 0 sheep (-3)	Iran (1)	120,000	5-year decline driven by divorce (large debts), few coping options.
A06	III	10	-/38	-	4	-/-	Normally sufficient	1 donkey	Iran (1) Mazar (2)	2,000	Small decline due to food prices, protected by diverse and regular incomes of 4 working sons.
A07	III	6	52/35	1	0	-/-	Food security dependent on remittance/bride price receipt	0	0	8,000	+5-year decline, few coping options as lack labour. Married 3 daughters over this time.

Annex 2. Village B households

Household	Wealth group	Size	M/F head age	Wives	Male labour (aged 15+)	Rain-fed / Irrigated land owned (jeribs)	Food sufficiency	Livestock (change)	Migration destination (number)	Debt (Afs)	Trajectory, Notes
B01	I	10	45/36	1	5	100/15	200 sers consumption (normal year sufficient, good 3+ years)	3 cattle 8 sheep (-50) 2 donkeys	0	0	More recent decline. Brother farms shared land, diverse salaried income sources.
B02	II	11	83/50	1	4	-/2	Cash crop sales (melon) earn up to 10-15,000 Afs - sufficient	0 cattle (-2) 2 sheep (-12) 1 donkey (-2)	0 (2 returned)	240,000	Steep decline. Lost land in dispute. 3 significant health shocks major driver.
B03	II	8	48/38	1	3	25/6	Normally 6-8 months self-sufficient. Large melon harvests	1 cattle (-3) 2 sheep (-9) 2 donkeys	Pakistan (1)	10,000	2 year decline. Sold 4j land for health shock in 2003, recent downturn linked to primarily to drought.
B04	II	12	46/41	1	3	12/8	300 sers consumption (normal year partial, good year sufficient)	0 cattle (-2) 10 sheep 1 donkey	Pakistan (1)	40,000	3 year decline. Salary and strong credit lines protect from further decline. Can no longer afford to farm.
B05	II	17	60/50	1	5	25/1	550 sers consumption (normal year 8-9 months, good 2 years)	2 cattle (-2) 20 sheep (-60) 1 donkey (-2?)	Mazar (3)	15,000	3 year decline, driven by drought. Sufficient male labour enables remittance.
B06	III	7	65/44	1	3	20/-	170 sers consumption (normal year 3-6 months, good 8)	1 cattle (-1) 1 sheep 1 donkey (-1)	Pakistan (4)	20,000	3-5 year decline, half of family went to Pakistan. Diverse income and good social connections.
B07	III	6	60/50	2	1	8/2	125 sers (normal year 6 months, good year sufficient)	1 cow (-3) 2 sheep (-2) 1 donkey	Pakistan (1)	None (averse)	Steep 2-3 year decline. Sold land for 30,000 Afs in 2006, married 2 daughters. Previously many melons.
B08	III	6	-/40	-	1	2/4	Normal year 1-2 months self-sufficient	1 sheep (-5)	Mazar (1)	15,000	Sharp decline. Widowed 2004, but now stable due to regular income.

## Annex 3. Village C households

Household	Wealth group	Size	M/F head age	Wives	Male labour (aged 15+)	Rain-fed / Irrigated land owned (jeribs)	Food sufficiency	Livestock (change)	Migration destination (number)	Debt (Af\$)	Trajectory, Notes
C01	I	8	50/40	2	3	35/6	500 <i>seers</i> consumption (normal year 6-9 months, good year surplus)	40 sheep (-250) 2 donkeys	0	80,000	Steep decline, large livestock sales and debt taken for consumption.
C02	II	12	40/31	1	2	20/8	400 <i>seers</i> consumption (normal year sufficient)	3 cattle (+1) 40 sheep (-40) 2 donkeys	0	None	10 year decline (health), many land and livestock sales. Stabilised through corrupt <i>shura</i> income.
C03	II	8	50/30	1	2	10/-	No information - joint family, remittance dependent	0 sheep (-20) 1 donkey	Iran (2)	3,000	Decline, returned from Iran in 2001, unable to re-establish livelihood locally.
C04	II	8	60/35	1	1	-/-	Chronically food-insecure	0 cattle (-2) 0 sheep (-10)	0	250,000	Steep decline, sold land and married 2 daughters. Lack labour to farm or repay long term debts.
C05	II	10	-/50	-	2	30s/-	Normal year 2 months, good 6 months	0 cows (-6) 30 sheep (-50) 1 donkey	Iran (1) (1 returned)	50,000	Steep 5-year decline, driven by death of household head and increased dependents.
C06	III	8	-/40	-	2	-/-	No information -dependent on sons labouring	0 sheep (-20) 1 donkey	Iran (1)	50,000	Decline. Household head died 2006, though repaid large debts through labour.
C07	III	5	40/30	1	1	-/-	Chronically food insecure	None	1 (Kunduz, Pul-i-Khumri)	20,000	Stark decline. Previously income vulnerable, now surviving day to day.
C08	III	8	64/37	1	2	-/-	Normally less than 6 months self-sufficient	0 cattle (-1) 0 sheep (-10)	Pakistan (1)	50,000	Gradual drought related decline, but protected by social connections and diversified income sources.

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