

Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit  
Synthesis Paper Series

# RUNNING OUT OF OPTIONS

Tracing Rural Afghan Livelihoods



Paula Kantor and Adam Pain

January 2011





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**Paula Kantor and Adam Pain**

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## About the Authors

Paula Kantor is co-principle investigator on the study of rural livelihood change for which this paper was written. She was the Director of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) from August 2008 to July 2010. Prior to that she worked as AREU's senior research manager for gender and livelihoods and as a lecturer in social development at the University of East Anglia (UK) School of International Development.

Adam Pain is also co-principle investigator for this study. He has worked on issues of rural livelihoods in the Himalayan region for the last 20 years. He is a senior research fellow at the University of East Anglia (UK) School of International Development, and a visiting professor of rural development at the Department of Urban and Rural Development, Swedish University of Agricultural Science, Uppsala. His recent research has focused on informal credit structures in rural Afghan communities and rural livelihoods in the context of the opium economy.

## About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

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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 Denmark, 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) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

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Paula Kantor  
December 2010

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## Glossary

<i>ailaq</i>	summer pasture for grazing animals
<i>gilim</i>	type of flat woven carpet
<i>khairat</i>	religious charity; often given as a meal prepared in the mosque for the poor of the village, sponsored either by several villagers or one wealthy household
<i>palas</i>	type of flat, woven carpet with simple pattern
<i>pau</i>	unit of weight equivalent to just under half a kilogramme
<i>qalin</i>	type of woven carpet consisting of a pile knotted into a textile backing
<i>shura</i>	community council
<i>ushr</i>	religious charity; given by landowners to poor villagers consisting of ten percent of the harvest
<i>zakat</i>	religious charity; one percent of harvest and/or livestock holdings, offered to the poor once per year

## Acronyms

ARD	agriculture and rural development
AREDP	Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Program
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
CDC	Community Development Council
GoA	Government of Afghanistan
MISFA	Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan
MoLSAMD	Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled
MoPH	Ministry of Public Health
NGO	nongovernmental organisation
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
NRVA	National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment
WFP	World Food Program



## Executive Summary

In 2002-03, AREU research teams documented the livelihoods of dozens of rural households across seven Afghan provinces. New research suggests that toward the end of the decade, many of these same households struggle to meet day to day needs, and are even worse off than before. Their futures are clouded by uncertainty and by a lack of good quality livelihood options that could bring security.

This paper examines how and why the livelihoods of 64 households from eight villages across Badakhshan, Kandahar and Sar-i-Pul Provinces have changed between 2002 and 2009. It found that while many have experienced improvements in access to basic services since 2002, livelihood security—whether a household’s skills, assets and activities are enough to make and sustain a living—has declined for the majority. Changes outside of their control, including drought, the ban on opium poppy cultivation and rising global food prices, led to large decreases in agricultural production or threatened food security. Those involved in nonfarm employment intensified their work in response; they were joined by new entrants seeking ways to earn cash income. Both of these responses drove down wages and depressed the job market. At the same time, dependence on those providing access to employment, charity, food aid and credit increased.

Within this economic and social context, coping with ill-health or meeting the cost of vital social engagements such as weddings became increasingly difficult; some could no longer afford healthcare while others delayed marriages. Many households found themselves sinking ever deeper into debt; those without male labourers were often left with little option but to marry their daughters young to secure whatever bride price they could.

Virtually all households who were able to maintain or improve their livelihood security did so by diversifying out of agriculture. However, reducing reliance on farming was not a guaranteed strategy. Most declining households diversified away from agriculture into nonfarm work as well, either in

Afghanistan or in neighbouring countries. However, this was more often a forced response to the opium poppy cultivation ban, drought conditions, or a mixture of the two. The households with improving and stable livelihood security more often diversified based on skills or connections that gave them access to higher quality nonfarm employment, specifically salaried work. Location also mattered. The majority of those with improving or stable livelihood security were found in Kandahar. Political connections and initial wealth helped drive some households to rapid improvements in livelihood security, often helped by poor villagers’ dependence on them for work. For others, access to Kandahar’s vibrant informal urban economy provided opportunities for small improvements. Household composition also played a role: those with more male workers were generally better placed to diversify more effectively. Limits on women’s economic activities and girls’ education constrain household diversification potential today and in future, threatening women’s individual security as well as household outcomes.

Many respondent households were wary of engaging with markets, which raises questions about the strong emphasis in current agriculture and rural development (ARD) policy on market-oriented agricultural production. This level of cautiousness suggests that a more measured approach to market-led growth is needed. In many areas, stabilising livelihoods and achieving food security would seem to be first steps before encouraging increased market engagement. This means giving subsistence production equal attention in ARD programmes. For families in more remote regions with fewer viable options for market production, improving subsistence production can form part of a social protection strategy. This should be augmented with opportunities to access training and education so those wishing to leave agriculture can do so on better terms than currently possible.

The considerable risks associated with agricultural livelihoods and doubts over the sector’s viability in the medium-term also point to the need to invest

in urban development and job creation. Given that households' pursuit of livelihood strategies is rarely confined to a single geographic space, these efforts should be part of a realistic rural development strategy. Rural development should not be about rural locations but about rural residents. Similarly, the extension of rural residents' livelihood activities into neighbouring countries highlights the need to protect labour migrants from the risk of exploitation.

Social protection needs to not only fill deficits in access to resources but also to secure the ability of all Afghans to move out of poverty. This means securing their ability to pursue their livelihoods with greater autonomy and less vulnerability to exploitation or abuse of power. The data from this study is full of examples of inequality and dependence placing limits on the choices people have and their ability to succeed in pursuing them. Examples include gender norms, unequal employment relationships, sharecrop arrangements, and the ability of local powerholders in some villages to co-opt resources meant for the village as a whole. Aid actors need to acknowledge the influence these systems have and identify ways to work with local communities to begin transforming them.

All of these considerations should form parts of a joined-up approach to improving livelihood security which protects the most vulnerable, prevents

damaging loss after shocks such as ill-health or failed harvests, promotes improved capacities and transforms existing inequalities. Key areas for policy attention include:

- Reducing risks related to the variability of agricultural output
- Improving the quantity and quality of nonfarm employment opportunities
- Expanding the types of financial services provided to include savings and insurance products
- Assisting households to cope with high health costs
- Identifying appropriate ways to manage spending levels on social events
- Enhancing education quality and accessibility to improve its promotive potential
- Building from local, informal means of social assistance to develop formal programmes where easy access and transparency are assured
- Integrating attention to the social context and existing inequalities into development programme design and implementation

# 1. Introduction

Constant change has characterised life in Afghanistan, from the turmoil of its decades of conflict through to the triumphs and disappointments of the period since 2001. For some, new economic opportunities and access to services have led to improvements in living standards. But drought and rising physical insecurity have inflicted damaging blows to the well-being of many others. Rural residents have carved diverse paths to securing their livelihoods throughout the political, social and economic turbulence of the past decades. Their resilience in doing so, resting on informal structures rooted in community relationships and only weakly supported by the state and market institutions, has been remarkable. However, differences in village and household characteristics make the outcomes of these institutions and relationships variable. Those with resources or connections to powerful patrons can accumulate considerable wealth. This dependence on connections is shared by those less socially or materially well-off, but in most cases these connections are used to reduce uncertainty, and not to prosper.<sup>1</sup> Their use frequently comes at the cost of dependence on those who can offer security, and the relationships often require constant investment to preserve them. Poverty reduction therefore requires interventions which reduce not only risk and uncertainty, but also the need of the marginalised and less powerful to depend on others for their livelihoods. Better knowledge of the sources of risk rural Afghans face and variations in how they can manage them is needed to inform such efforts.<sup>2</sup>

This paper is the culmination of a broader research project which aims to provide this knowledge.<sup>3</sup> It

draws from a multi-year study of rural livelihood change which collected in-depth qualitative data from 64 households in eight villages spread across three provinces, along with village-level data from three communities in a fourth.<sup>4</sup> By examining experiences of rural livelihood change, it seeks to identify the complex range of risks, uncertainties and opportunities rural households across a range of contexts and wealth levels faced, how they were able to respond to them, and what consequences this had for their livelihood security. It builds from previous papers which established the importance of social relationships and patronage in helping rural Afghan households survive or flourish, and the need to understand local context in designing and implementing livelihood programmes.<sup>5</sup>

Based on findings from previous papers, this synthesis paper compares the livelihood trajectories of households and villages across different geographic, economic and social backgrounds. It not only assesses economic risks affecting income and consumption levels but also the risks posed by social inequalities, which determine how different groups are included in society and the range of choices open to them. The inclusion of social risks also responds to more recent developments in broader understandings

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Pain, "Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories: Evidence from Badakhshan" (Kabul: AREU, 2009); Tom Shaw, "Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories: Evidence from Sar-i-Pul" (Kabul: AREU, 2010); and Batul Nezami with Paula Kantor, "Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories: Evidence from Faryab" (Kabul: AREU, 2010)); a pair of papers examining the role of social relationships and broader village contexts in determining livelihood outcomes (Paula Kantor and Adam Pain, "Securing Life and Livelihoods in Rural Afghanistan: The Role of Social Relationships" (Kabul: AREU, 2010) and Adam Pain and Paula Kantor, "Understanding and Addressing Context in Rural Afghanistan: How Villages Differ and Why" (Kabul: AREU, 2010)); and a paper on the relevance of social analysis to agriculture and rural development policy making (Paula Kantor and Adam Pain, "Poverty In Afghan Policy: Enhancing Solutions through Better Defining the Problem" (Kabul: AREU, 2010)).

1 Geof Wood, "Staying Secure and Staying Poor: The Faustian Bargain," *World Development* 31, no. 3 (2003): 455-71.

2 Ian Christophos, "Out of Step? Agricultural Policy and Afghan Livelihoods" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2004).

3 Other papers in the series include: detailed case studies for each research province (see Adam Pain, "Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories: Evidence from Kandahar" (Kabul: AREU, 2010); Adam

4 The study was funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), grant number RES-167-25-0285. As discussed in section 3, the methods used in Faryab (the fourth province) differed due to the security context.

5 Kantor and Pain, "Securing Life"; Pain and Kantor, "Understanding and Addressing"; Kantor and Pain, "Poverty in Afghan Policy."

of risk and social protection, which acknowledge that addressing risks from both of these sources is necessary to achieve sustainable reductions in poverty.

Based on the case households' experiences, the paper identifies key policy areas which can address both types of risk. A detailed understanding of how and why livelihoods change over time is of central importance to informing efforts to promote growth and reduce rural poverty. If used, it can ensure that these efforts are appropriately targeted, reflect the complex realities of rural

life and enable as many people to improve their livelihoods—and lives—as possible.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 develops the conceptual framework for the study, focusing on risk, vulnerability and social protection; Section 3 outlines study methodology and village contexts; Section 4 presents the case evidence of livelihood change, exploring patterns of improvement and decline in the face of both positive and negative experiences; Section 5 expands these observations into a series of policy prescriptions; and Section 6 concludes the paper.

## 2. Risk, Vulnerability and Social Protection

The International Fund for Agriculture and Development's (IFAD) recently released *Rural Poverty Report 2011* highlights the need to pay greater attention to risk reduction as part of efforts to enhance rural development and growth.<sup>6</sup> It acknowledges the central role agriculture and the rural nonfarm economy can play in promoting development in some of the world's poorer nations, but only if existing and emerging sources of uncertainty can be managed. These include natural resource degradation, climate change, and changes in domestic and global markets for agricultural products. Past research from the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) AREU supports the application of these assertions to Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup> In order to better help rural residents to avoid and cope with risk and reduce vulnerability to poverty, clarity in understanding the types and sources of risk people face is needed. This section lays out both an understanding of risk that is suited to the Afghan context and the approach to social protection with which it corresponds.

### 2.1 Risk and vulnerability

“Vulnerability” emerged as a development concern in response to the static nature of existing research on poverty. This tended to provide snapshots of households at a single point in time that failed to capture the dynamic forces influencing livelihood security and experiences of poverty. Vulnerability is therefore a more complex concept which is geared toward capturing changes in socioeconomic status over time rather than taking it as a starting point, and is defined as exposure to risk of being or becoming poor.<sup>8</sup> The extent of people's

6 International Fund for Agricultural Development, *Rural Poverty Report 2011* (Rome: IFAD, 2010).

7 Lorene Flaming and Alan Roe, “Opportunities for Pro-Poor Agricultural Growth” (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2009); Christoplos, “Out of Step?”; Paula Kantor, “From Access to Impact: Microcredit and Rural Livelihoods in Afghanistan” (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2009).

8 P. Glewwe and G. Hall, “Who is Most Vulnerable to Macroeconomic

vulnerability to poverty is determined by their ability to respond to risk without damaging losses to current or future well-being.<sup>9</sup> Households and individuals vary in their capacities to respond to risk, leading to different livelihood outcomes.

Combining both social and economic considerations gives interventions more scope to target the causes of vulnerability to poverty as well as its symptoms. Since these causes lie in how societies operate, a major part of dealing with them involves effecting a degree of transformation within society itself.

“Risk”—the probability of a loss happening—is therefore central to the definition of vulnerability, and differences in how policymakers understand sources and types of risk affect their approaches to reducing vulnerability to poverty.<sup>10</sup> The World Bank's Social Risk Management (SRM) framework represents an early effort to understand risk and social protection from an economic perspective.<sup>11</sup> It is based on the assertion that the poor are the most exposed to risk and that they have the least resources available to respond to it.<sup>12</sup> These

Shocks? Hypotheses Tests Using Panel Data from Peru” (Washington DC: World Bank, 1995); Naila Kabeer, “Safety Nets and Opportunity Ladders: Addressing Vulnerability and Enhancing Productivity in South Asia” (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2002).

9 Kabeer, “Safety Nets”; Robert Chambers, “Editorial Introduction: Vulnerability, Coping and Policy,” *IDS Bulletin* 20, no. 2 (1988): 1-7; Caroline Moser, “The Asset Vulnerability Framework: Reassessing Urban Poverty Reduction Strategies,” *World Development* 26, no. 1 (1998): 1-19.

10 J. Athearn and S.T. Pritchett, *Risk and Insurance* (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Co., 1984); Bruce Guenther, Karishma Huda and Ian Macauslan, “Broadening Social Risk Management: Risks, Rights and the Chronic Poor,” *IDS Bulletin* 38, no. 3 (2007): 17-19.

11 Robert Holzmann and Steen Jorgensen, “Social Protection as Social Risk Management: Conceptual Underpinnings for the Social Protection Sector Strategy Paper” (Washington DC: World Bank, 1999).

12 Robert Holzmann and Valerie Kozel, “The Role of Social Risk Management in Development: A World Bank View,” *IDS Bulletin* 38, no. 3 (2007): 8-13.



principles thus imply that the poor are the most vulnerable due to the high negative impact of shocks on their welfare. High levels of vulnerability are expected to lead the poor to avoid risk as much as possible, even if this comes at the expense of higher returns. This understanding leads the SRM framework to focus on finding ways to manage income and consumption risks to enable the poor to engage in more lucrative activities that are more likely to lift them out of poverty. In doing so, it identifies the following three strategies:<sup>13</sup>

- **Risk reduction:** efforts to reduce the possibility of experiencing variations in income or consumption flows in the first place. These might include engaging in less risky livelihood activities, disease prevention or migration.
- **Risk mitigation:** efforts to reduce the impact of shocks on income or consumption. This may include diversifying people's assets and livelihood activities, or providing forms of insurance from the market or informal sources such as social networks.
- **Risk coping:** actions after a shock or negative event to minimise its effects, such as borrowing, asset sales or mobilising more workers.

This framework has been important for attracting attention to the need to develop ways to manage risk. However, evidence from rural Afghanistan demonstrates that in addition to economic factors, social inequalities and social relationships have a particularly important effect on household livelihood strategies and outcomes.<sup>14</sup> They can be thought of as forms of chronic risk which make and maintain the marginal status of certain social groups, such as women.<sup>15</sup>

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13 Holzmann and Kozel, "Role of Social Risk Management"; Stephen Devereux and Rachel Sabates-Wheeler, "Transformative Social Protection" (Brighton: IDS, 2004).

14 Kantor and Pain, "Securing Life and Livelihoods"; Kantor, "From Access to Impact."

15 Cook and Kabeer, "Exclusion, Deficits and Trajectories."

In addition, social factors such as discrimination and marginalisation affect the abilities of different groups to respond to risks. Resource deficits coupled with poor social positions may mean less privileged groups are forced to choose responses that are far more damaging and irreversible than those available to the more socially and economically privileged.<sup>16</sup> For example, they may be less able to diversify economic activities, turning instead to reducing consumption, forgoing health or education investments, having women work outside the home, or entering into exploitative relationships with patrons which provide little room to move out of poverty. This does not mean their actions are wholly determined by their social position, but that individuals act within a context influenced by history and existing social differences. Any framework defining risk to inform policy and programming in Afghanistan must therefore account for risks associated with the social context and how its societies work.

Combining both social and economic considerations gives interventions more scope to target the causes of vulnerability to poverty as well as its symptoms. Since these causes lie in how societies operate, a major part of dealing with them involves effecting a degree of transformation within society itself.<sup>17</sup>

## 2.2 Transformative social protection

Social protection describes the range of interventions developed and delivered to provide protection against risk. Initially the concept was limited to providing a minimum income to the most poor; it has since expanded to include preventative mechanisms and more recently to promoting capabilities and transforming social structures.<sup>18</sup> "Transformative" social protection is

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16 Kabeer, "Safety Nets."

17 Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux, "Social Protection for Transformation"; Cook and Kabeer, "Exclusion, Deficits and Trajectories."

18 A. Bonilla Garcia and J.V. Gruat, "Social Protection: A Life Cycle Continuum Investment for Social Justice, Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development" (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2003).



a multi-faceted approach that incorporates all of these elements in an attempt to tackle both social and economic sources of risk.<sup>19</sup> It is defined as:

*...all initiatives that transfer income or assets to the poor, protect the vulnerable against livelihood risks, and enhance the social status and rights of the marginalised; with the overall objectives of extending the benefits of economic growth and reducing the economic or social vulnerability of poor, vulnerable and marginalised people.*<sup>20</sup>

By combining these factors, it extends the focus of social protection to strengthening people's capacity to lift themselves out of poverty, and to addressing the structural constraints and unequal distributions that limit their efforts to do so.<sup>21</sup> It is thus an approach well-suited to addressing the webs of power and inequality that underpin the livelihoods of so many in rural Afghanistan.

Transformative social protection employs four complimentary approaches. This framework will be applied to policy prescriptions set out later in this paper:<sup>22</sup>

- Protective: filling deficits in people's basic needs. These tend to be narrowly-targeted resource transfers to the most poor including disability benefits, services for those needing care including orphanages, and the removal of access fees for basic services.
- Preventive: measures to prevent deprivation and directly alleviate poverty. These overlap with the SRM framework's risk reduction and mitigation measures and include both

diversification and formal and informal social insurance programmes. These would reach both those in poverty as well as those at risk of becoming poor.

- Promotive: measures to stabilise and build people's incomes and capabilities. Examples include skills development to support diversification, and public works programmes that build quality economic infrastructure.
- Transformative: efforts to address social inequalities sustaining vulnerability to poverty. Examples include collective action to improve working conditions and legal protection against discrimination.

These measures are not mutually exclusive and interventions can occupy some or all categories depending on how they are designed and implemented.<sup>23</sup> One example is school feeding programmes that encourage households to send their children to school instead of put them to work. They can protect by helping households improve food security; they can promote by improving children's access to better jobs in the long run; and they can also transform if school curricula address issues of social justice.

Transformative social protection is not without challenges in implementation, particularly in Afghanistan.<sup>24</sup> Some advocates have suggested that social protection become a mainstay of wider development investments, arguing that this would lead to a more coordinated, long-term approach instead of narrow short-term projects that address the symptoms of poverty instead of its causes.<sup>25</sup> However, this clashes with the current political reality in Afghanistan, where pressure to show quick results trumps interest in dealing with the structural causes of poverty.

19 Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, "Transformative Social Protection"; Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux, "Social Protection for Transformation."

20 Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux, "Social Protection for Transformation," 25.

21 Cook and Kabeer, "Exclusion, Deficits and Trajectories"; United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), "Combating Poverty and Inequality," (Geneva: UNRISD, 2010).

22 Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux, "Social Protection for Transformation"; Cook and Kabeer, "Exclusion, Deficits and Trajectories."

23 UNRISD, "Combating Poverty"; Naila Kabeer, "A 'Vision' Thing? Debate and Difference within the OECD-DAC Poverty Network Approaches to Social Protection," *IDS Bulletin* 38, no. 3 (2007): 51-53.

24 Ken Aoo, Saul Butters, Nicolina Lamhauge, Rebecca Napier-Moore and Yuko Ono, "Whose (Transformative) Reality Counts? A Critical Review of the Transformation Social Protection Framework," *IDS Bulletin* 38, no. 3 (2007): 29-31.

25 Cook and Kabeer, "Exclusion, Deficits and Trajectories."

In a country fragmented by a myriad of competing interests, another critical challenge is establishing how desired social transformations are defined and by whom, to avoid impositions and excluding marginalised groups. This is further complicated by the difficulty of working for social change in a conflict situation. Social change is a political process. Agencies deciding to support

transformative processes may risk the neutrality that provides them access to communities. However, not doing so may mean continued entrenchment of the social relations that keep people poor and can ultimately help drive conflict. Transformative social protection is therefore vital to providing a just and lasting base of support to all rural Afghans seeking to rebuild—and improve—their lives.

## 3. Study Methods and Contexts

This section briefly describes the research approach and interview procedures the study followed in collecting its household-level case data. It then provides an overview of the eight study villages in Kandahar, Sar-i-Pul and Badakhshan where detailed research was conducted.<sup>26</sup>

### 3.1 Research approach

This study builds from a previous study by AREU documenting the state of rural livelihoods in Afghanistan in 2002-03.<sup>27</sup> It revisited a selection of field sites from the initial study to understand how and why changes occurred in the lives and livelihoods of case study households over the period 2002-09. The current study sought to gain a detailed picture of the factors influencing rural livelihood change and how these varied across household, village and provincial contexts. Its focus was on investigating patterns of similarity and difference and why they exist. It therefore took a qualitative research approach to build an in-depth understanding of livelihood change from a small number of carefully selected household cases. The study was carried out in Kandahar, Badakhshan, Sar-i-Pul and Faryab.<sup>28</sup>

There was some variation in how the study proceeded in each site. For Kandahar and Badakhshan, NGO partners Mercy Corps and the Aga Khan Foundation respectively carried out the fieldwork with training and monitoring from AREU. In Kandahar, Mercy Corps could only safely carry out

26 For further detail on study methods in each province, see the relevant AREU case studies listed on page 3. For a more detailed description of the village contexts and their role in relation to livelihoods, see Pain and Kantor, "Understanding and Addressing Context."

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

28 Data for Kandahar was collected between August 2008 and March 2009; data for Badakhshan between August 2008 and July 2009; data for Sar-i-Pul between June 2008 and June 2009; and data for Faryab in November 2009.

research in two of the three villages from the earlier study. An AREU field team conducted the research in Sar-i-Pul and Faryab. However, recent insurgent incursions into the Faryab study district limited travel to the villages and did not allow for detailed household interviews. The Faryab case study therefore focused on issues at a village rather than household level and examined how two major changes in the study area—drought and rising insecurity—have affected lives and livelihoods across the three sites. Since this paper's focus is on individual households, it only draws on the Faryab findings to support patterns identified in the household data from the other eight villages.

### 3.2 Interview procedures

In-depth household interviews formed the main bulk of the fieldwork. The fieldwork teams were composed of two female and two male Afghan interviewers, guaranteeing they could speak to both male and female respondents. In total four interviews were held per household, two with men and two with women. These were augmented by data collected on the study villages and districts so that household experiences could be understood within broader local contexts. The stages followed in data collection are provided below.

- *Household profile*: Using the 2002-03 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 2002-03.
- *Introductory interviews*: The interview team introduced themselves to the village, holding a focus group discussion with both men and women to collect general information about the village itself, and changes to livelihood activities and security since 2002-03. A series of introductory discussions then followed with all the original sample households still present in the village.<sup>29</sup> These interviews

29 Generally three to four families were no longer living in each

were informed by the household profiles and explored changes within the household (such as composition or economy) and directions of household fortunes (improving, maintaining or declining).

- *Household selection*: Based on the introductory interview evidence, a sub-sample of eight households, proportional to the number of households in each wealth group in the original 20-household sample from the 2002-03 study, was selected for further interviews.<sup>30</sup> Selection was guided by the desire for diversity according to wealth group, livelihood trajectory (when such variation existed), household size and composition, land holdings and livelihood portfolios.
- *Household interview guides and interviews*: A standard household interview guide structured around eight common themes<sup>31</sup> was used across teams to ensure each one collected data on the same topics. 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), with each interviewed twice.

### 3.3 Study contexts

The demographics of the eight study villages are laid out in Table 1, along with their respective levels of service provision. The description focuses on basic services because they form a foundation for social protection.<sup>32</sup>

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study village or its vicinity.

30 Across study villages one to two respondent households were in the highest wealth group, or 19 percent in total. Wealth groups were defined by elders in each study village during the 2002-03 study and were normally divided into poor, middle and wealthy.

31 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 and informal systems, and wider context.

32 For more detailed information on village history, geography and social structures see Pain and Kantor, "Understanding and Addressing Context"; and Kantor and Pain, "Securing Life and Livelihoods."

The two Kandahar villages of Lalakai and Julan were located in Dand District, a ten to fifteen minute drive to Kandahar City.<sup>33</sup> Residents used health and education services in the city as none were provided in the villages. Residents in Lalakai received power from the grid for about three hours per day; at other times the main landlord provided power through his own generator. In Julan, only those wealthy enough to own generators had access to electricity. Both villages access drinking water through communal or private bore wells.

The Sar-i-Pul villages of Kushlak, Pishin and Sarband are located in Sayyad District, one of the poorest in the province. All three have access to potable drinking water, though this service has less coverage in Sarband village. Some respondents in Sarband reported having to use others' private wells for drinking water, making them dependent on others for access to this basic requirement. All three villages have a communally-owned generator, but only in Pishin have village leadership and residents been able to afford the fuel needed to run it. As the district centre, Pishin has a health clinic in the village, which residents of the other two villages travel short distances to access. Kushlak is the only village of the three without a boys' or girls' school. Not surprisingly, attendance here is lower than the others and girls in particular are not allowed to travel to the district centre to study. Some boys did so, sometimes aided by drought conditions which reduced farm work and left them free to study.

The Badakhshan villages of Shur Qul, Toghloq and Khilar are in Yamgan and Jurm Districts. Khilar is the smallest and most under-serviced of all the eight study villages. It does not have access to clean water, and its residents struggle with water-borne illnesses which have been vastly reduced in the other Badakhshan and Sar-i-Pul study villages with the installation of new drinking water services. It also lacks electricity, and residents have to travel to the valley to access the local schools and clinic. However, access to the valley has been improved by a new road funded by the village's National Solidarity Programme (NSP)-

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33 All names of case villages and households are fictitious.

**Table 1: Village demographics and basic service access**

<b>Village name, * size, ethnicity</b>	<b>Potable water</b>	<b>Electricity</b>	<b>Health</b>	<b>Education</b>
<b>Kandahar</b>				
Lalakai; 1000 families; Pashtun	Access	Access; fee for use; City power 3 hours/day; landlord provides generator power	In Kandahar city; 10-15 min drive	In Kandahar city, for boys
Julan; 412 families; Pashtun	Access	No access except for wealthy (own generators)	In Kandahar city; 10-15 min drive	In Kandahar city, for boys
<b>Sar-i-Pul</b>				
Kushlak; 180 families; Uzbek	Access	No access; NSP generator unsustainable due to fuel costs	In district centre; 2 km away	In district centre; only boys allowed to travel
Pishin; 1200 families; Mainly Uzbek	Access in last 2 yrs	Access; fee for use	Clinic in village	Boys and girls schools
Sarband; 1100 families; Arab and Pashtun	Access but some still access through relations with people with wells	No access; NSP generator unsustainable due to fuel costs	In district (20 km) or provincial centre (5 km)	Boys and girls schools
<b>Badakhshan</b>				
Shur Qul; 302 families; Tajik	Access but poor quality equipment; broken for 2 yrs and recently fixed	Access; fee for use	Clinic in village	Boys and girls school; long history of education
Toghloq; 178 families; Tajik	Access in last 3 yrs	Access in last 3 yrs; fee for use	Go to Jurm, Baharak or Faisabad for treatment; Jurm 45 minute drive	Boys school; Girls school in last 5 yrs
Khilar; 44 families; Ismaili	No access	No access	In the valley; 1.5 hours walk	In the valley; 1.5 hours walk

\*For a table linking village names to codes used in individual case studies, see Appendix 3

established Community Development Council (CDC). One of the male residents teaches at the girls' school and enables greater access to female education by accompanying girls from the village there each day.

Both Shur Qul and Toghloq have drinking water, electricity and education facilities in the village. The drinking water infrastructure in Shur Qul had been broken for almost two years and was only recently fixed by an NGO, while NSP funds in both villages financed electricity infrastructure. Individuals paid for access to these services. Although some poor households struggled with this expense, they recognised its importance in supporting their children's studies. Shur Qul has a clinic in the village though some respondent households travelled up to one hour to use an alternative

clinic. Toghloq respondents reported travelling to Jurm, Baharak or Faizabad for treatment.

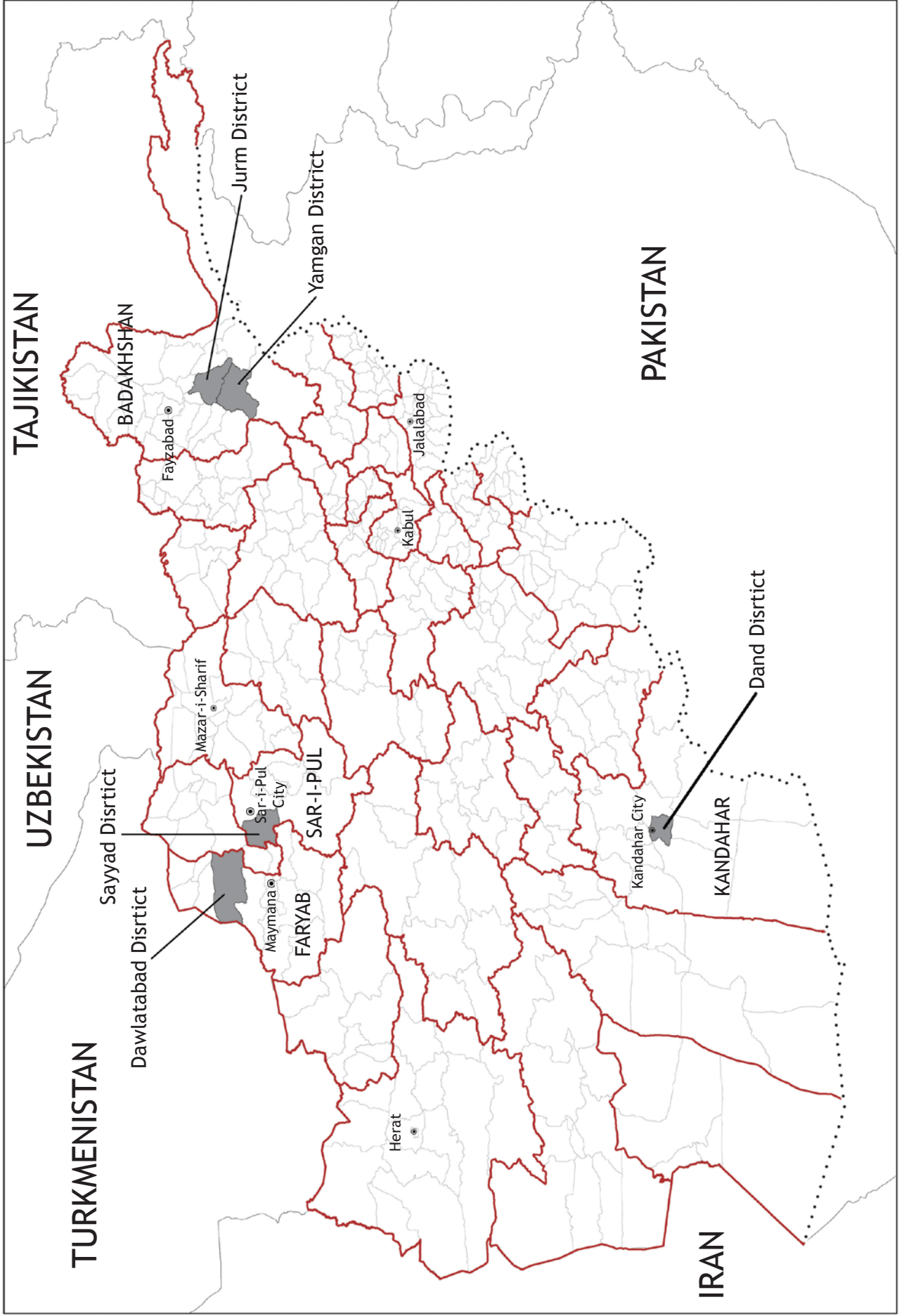
Since 2002 most of the study villages have seen improvements in the provision of social goods and in road connectivity.<sup>34</sup> However, provision does not always mean access, particularly in the face of entrenched gender norms or when direct or opportunity costs of access are above what is affordable. While the positive changes represented by improved services cannot be ignored, evidence across the 64 respondent households suggests that this forms only part of a much broader collection of forces influencing rural livelihoods. The following analysis identifies the complex mix of factors influencing the direction of livelihood change and shows how for many households, life in recent years has become worse, not better.

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34 A study by Altai Consulting confirms this; respondents reported positive changes due to access to social goods including female education, roads and electricity. See Altai Consulting, "Moving out of Poverty" (Kabul: Altai Consulting, 2006).



*Figure 1: Location of study areas*



## 4. Afghan Rural Livelihood Trajectories

Out of the 64 case households, 45–70 percent—experienced a drop in livelihood security. A range of factors largely outside of the households’ control, such as drought or the enforcement of a ban on opium cultivation, set the scene for this decline. Household-specific risks related to ill-health and high spending on social events such as weddings further added to the burden, as did a lack of viable alternative work to help cope with downturns in farming and livestock-rearing. The section starts with a summary of the factors that led a minority of households to improve their livelihood security, followed by a discussion of others managing to cope with the balance of positive and negative changes they experienced. It closes with a description of the complex interplay of factors that have led to the erosion of livelihood security for the large majority.<sup>35</sup>

### 4.1 Improving households

Out of the 64 case households, 13 experienced improvements in livelihood security. Some built on their existing wealth, while others starting out with meagre resources were able to carve out a measure of prosperity. In many cases, and particularly for those starting from poorer positions, these upward changes have come slowly and gradually—far from the “springboards” described in some social protection literature.<sup>36</sup> What is generally clear is that agriculture’s role in the livelihoods of these case households was generally a small or supportive one. Location was also a significant factor: 10 of the 13 improving households were from the two Kandahar villages.

35 For improving and coping households case data is summarised in tables in Appendices 1 and 2. Given the number of declining households, case data is not presented in a table. Instead, the pattern of factors leading to decline is diagrammed and the interactions between elements discussed with relation to case examples.

36 This corresponds with findings of a multi-year multi-site study of livelihood change, where household routes out of poverty were found to be limited and often unsustainable. See Anirudh Krishna, *One Illness Away: Why People Become Poor and How They Escape Poverty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

In general, a combination of inherited wealth, connections, access to work, and for most, multiple male workers to support diversification, led to improved livelihood security. The experiences of a few households below give colour to this picture of improvement.<sup>37</sup>

#### *Wealth*

Two respondent households<sup>38</sup> started from positions of economic and social wealth and continued to build from this, aided by significant male labour resources and connections to political elites. In both cases having multiple sons enabled diversification into nonfarm activities which reduced the households’ exposure to risks associated with agricultural shortfalls caused by rain or pest infestations. The case of Haji Yaqoub (Julan-40) also exemplifies a predatory use of elite power most evident in the Kandahar villages, linked to the strong social inequalities which define village life in both Lalakai and Julan.<sup>39</sup> Haji’s household is already land-rich and secures additional benefits from his position as head of the village *shura* (council) and his son’s car import business. However, he also reputedly confiscated land from one brother’s widow and a jewellery store from another, driving them into decline while further bolstering his own position.

#### *Connections*

Connections were another main driver of improvement, and were key in boosting the livelihoods of four other households.<sup>40</sup> In each case, the household started with few productive assets and achieved varying levels of improvement based on their ability to expand on

37 See Appendix 1 for detailed characteristics of the case households.

38 Lalakai-10 and Julan-40.

39 See Pain and Kantor, “Understanding and Addressing Context,” and Kantor and Pain, “Securing Life and Livelihoods” for more details.

40 Lalakai-05, Julan-42, Julan-57 and Julan-56.



them, mainly by shifting into nonfarm activities. Those with political connections and male family members to make use of them, like Haji Jamil's household (Julan-42), experienced the largest improvements. Haji Jamil was able to exploit the local Hindu population's departure from the village to buy low cost land and invest in a bore well. This supported a raisin business that started his family's upward trajectory. However, things improved dramatically 2007 when Jamil's connections to the family of President Hamid Karzai landed his three sons salaried employment earning a total of around 300,000 Afs per month. This allowed the elderly head to remarry and assured the household's security, at least for the duration of the Karzai's rule. By contrast, Yakin (Julan-56) used family and personal ties to secure the credit and capital he needed to start earning income by providing transport services in addition to his work as a sharecropper, after cycling through a range of livelihood activities. Combined with the energy and ambition of Yakin and his wife, these helped them gradually and marginally improve their small family's fortunes despite a lack of additional male labour.

### **Skills and education**

In two Badakhshan households, it was ability rather than connections that allowed them to secure salaried work.<sup>41</sup> Of the two, Najeeb's household (Shur Qul-24) achieved the larger positive change. Najeeb's eldest son's ability to drive helped him obtain a salaried position as a driver with an international NGO. This supplemented Najeeb's irregular income from working in the local lapis lazuli mine and small output from the household's land. The salary lifted the household's economic fortunes, enabling it to easily afford medical treatment, eat well, and, as the overall creditworthiness of the family increased, borrow enough for the eldest son to marry and repay with confidence. However, the second son is struggling to find a means of contributing. He tried migrating to Iran through smugglers but returned with no income; he then left for Kabul to join the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

41 Shur Qul-24 and Shur Qul-34.

### **Proximity to urban economies**

Proximity to Kandahar's urban informal economy helped two of the Kandahar case households to improve, highlighting the importance of location to livelihood opportunities. Both are from Lalakai village and made use of opportunities in the city to avoid (Hamid, Lalakai-19) or move out of (Shafiq, Lalakai-03) dependent relationships with the village's main landlord, who wields considerable power to his own advantage. Shafiq's household improved based on the labour of one worker and his wife's embroidery, while Hamid, his brothers and his mother diversified into numerous activities catering to the urban market. Hamid's father died many years ago, but despite being effectively a female-headed family since then the household has experienced slow and steady improvement through access to better quality urban employment as he and his brothers grew up. These opportunities provide only irregular income and come with their own risks, particularly from municipal officials and various forms of informal taxation. The family has been able to go from wearing old clothes, surviving on bread and tea and leaving illness untreated to buying new clothes at Eid, cooking more often and using private doctors. They have also been able to reduce their reliance on credit.

### **Male workers**

The addition of a male worker such as a son coming of age was a critical factor in three other households.<sup>42</sup> While this was a factor in a number of other improving cases, respondents in these three specifically identified the increasing number of workers as central to their households' improvement. For Abdul Haq's household (Toghloq-70), male labour and a united joint family enabled agriculture and livestock activities to be its base of growth, the only household for which this was the case. While the family's fortunes suffered after the ban on opium cultivation, the boost the crop had provided still left them better off than in pre-opium days. It could sharecrop in more land and still send family members to the *ailaq* (summer pasture) to care for livestock.

42 Toghloq-70, Lalakai-16 and Julian-48.

In these cases, a combination of luck, hard work and the advantages described above have allowed households to consolidate their positions and lift themselves further out of poverty. In many instances this has left them able to ride out broader economic turbulence and better prepared to cope with the impact of one-off events such as ill-health or marriage. In the case of Muneer (Lalakai-10), the household was able to spend 74,000 Afs on healthcare costs and a 100,000 Afs bride price for a son's marriage without incurring any significant debt. Lack of or low debt characterises many of the improving households, as the data in Appendix 1 show. However, households with smaller livelihood improvements are in a much more fragile position, and remain exposed to risks that could easily strain household budgets to the point of halting improvement or even tipping them into decline. The households of Shafiq and Yakin are vulnerable due to their dependence on a sole main earner. Both have so far avoided health shocks and their children are too young to marry. However, any event affecting the men's ability to work or requiring high expenditures could easily move these households into poverty. Although Hamid and his brothers were able to pay for medical treatment for their mother in Pakistan and two marriages, the next brother wonders how the family will afford his marriage. All three of these households still have relatively high levels of debt.

## 4.2 Stable, coping households

Out of the 64 case study households, six maintained their positions, coping—easily or with some struggle—with the balance of positive and negative events they experienced.<sup>43</sup> There was often little to distinguish these households from those with small improvements like Shafiq's or Yakin's; in many cases those without the capacity to improve found themselves bogged down by burdens of health events, social ceremony expenditures and high debt levels.

<sup>43</sup> For details see Appendix 2. In the Badakhshan case study, more households were identified as maintaining or struggling than included here. This is because households which maintained their post-opium cultivation ban positions, which were lower than during opium cultivation, were classified as coping or maintaining. In this paper these households are classified as declining.

The first three coping cases (Badakhshan households Shur Qul-38, Toghloq-77 and Khilar-56) were able to cope with health events, drought and debt through the quality of the work their few workers could obtain. Each had at least one member with a salaried job. The salaries may not come regularly but the expectation of the income provided a measure of stability. Two of the three have sold livestock herds to repay debt, pay for marriages or meet other expenses. This illustrates the role of livestock as a stock of savings, sold in times of need. Two have sold land but this seems part of a gradual shift away from agriculture and livestock-based livelihoods, either through work with ANSF or expectations of better-quality work for their children currently in school. For example, the eldest son of Hajji Wadi's household (Shur Qul-38) is in the internship phase of his medical education. Hajji Wadi's household is the wealthiest among the six coping cases. Four dry years limiting land production have held it back from any major improvements, as has a lack of market access for recent good apple crops, which were fed to livestock or simply allowed to rot.

The last three cases (Kandahar households Lalakai-01, Lalakai-12 and Julan-50) coped with health costs, debts and social ceremonies in large part through their wealth of male labour and the multiple streams of income this brought. However, limited opportunities coupled with the burden of negative events balanced the improvement potential this offered. Additionally, the dependence of the two cases from Lalakai village on the main landlord for employment and housing limited the options available to them to improve their positions. Two of these households managed marriage costs through entering exchanges, even though these were less preferred.<sup>44</sup> These three cases are more vulnerable to decline than the Badakhshan ones as they have no land of their own and little or no livestock. The two from Lalakai are particularly vulnerable given the landlord's

<sup>44</sup> An exchange marriage occurs when two households swap daughters, each gaining a wife for one of their sons in the process. This generally means that bride prices are low or non-existent, and such marriages are perceived to lead to more conflict because if one daughter is ill-treated there is an expectation that the other should experience the same.

willingness to arbitrarily remove access to land and employment, which in these cases means losing their homes as well as their jobs.

The future potential of the Badakhshan households seems more positive given their investments in education of both boys and girls. However, for the Kandahar households there seems little scope for greater stability let alone improvement in future since few of the younger members have been educated or are studying.

### 4.3 Declining households

Out of the 64 case households 45 fall into the declining category. These households include three quarters of the Badakhshan households and all 24 of the Sar-i-Pul households. Only three Kandahar households are classified as declining. These numbers and the distribution of households by provincial location are statements in themselves of the challenges rural households have faced since 2002, particularly those in more remote locations. The high number of declining households represents the consequences of commonly-shared risks across the study villages in Badakhshan and Sar-i-Pul, also present in the Faryab villages. These shared risks were from sources well outside the households' control and included recurrent multi-year drought, the ban on opium poppy cultivation and the effects of rising food prices in 2008. They interacted with each other to varying degrees—the opium cultivation ban affected different villages to different extents, and was outweighed by the influence of drought in Sar-i-Pul and Faryab. However, when combined they all served to create environments of declining opportunities and growing livelihood insecurity.

These risks affected case households across all wealth groups. However, their impact depended on the frequency and combination of events each household experienced against the background of wider decline, and how well it was able to cope with the challenges this created.<sup>45</sup> Household-specific factors such as ill-health, social ceremonies,

land and livestock holdings, household size and composition (especially the presence of male labour), involvement in support or patronage networks and quality of employment opportunities all affected how far each household fell in the general descent. The diagram below traces out the complex interactions between the shared risks (rectangles on the left), household-level risks (ovals on the right), and the different effects of and responses to these risks (hexagons) identified across the declining cases from Badakhshan and Sar-i-Pul. Details of each case cannot be provided as in the previous sections because of the numbers involved. This section instead discusses the patterns of events and responses represented in the diagram to illustrate the cumulative and complex nature of rural risk and vulnerability that social protection programmes must address.

#### Mounting risk exposure

##### *Opium cultivation ban*

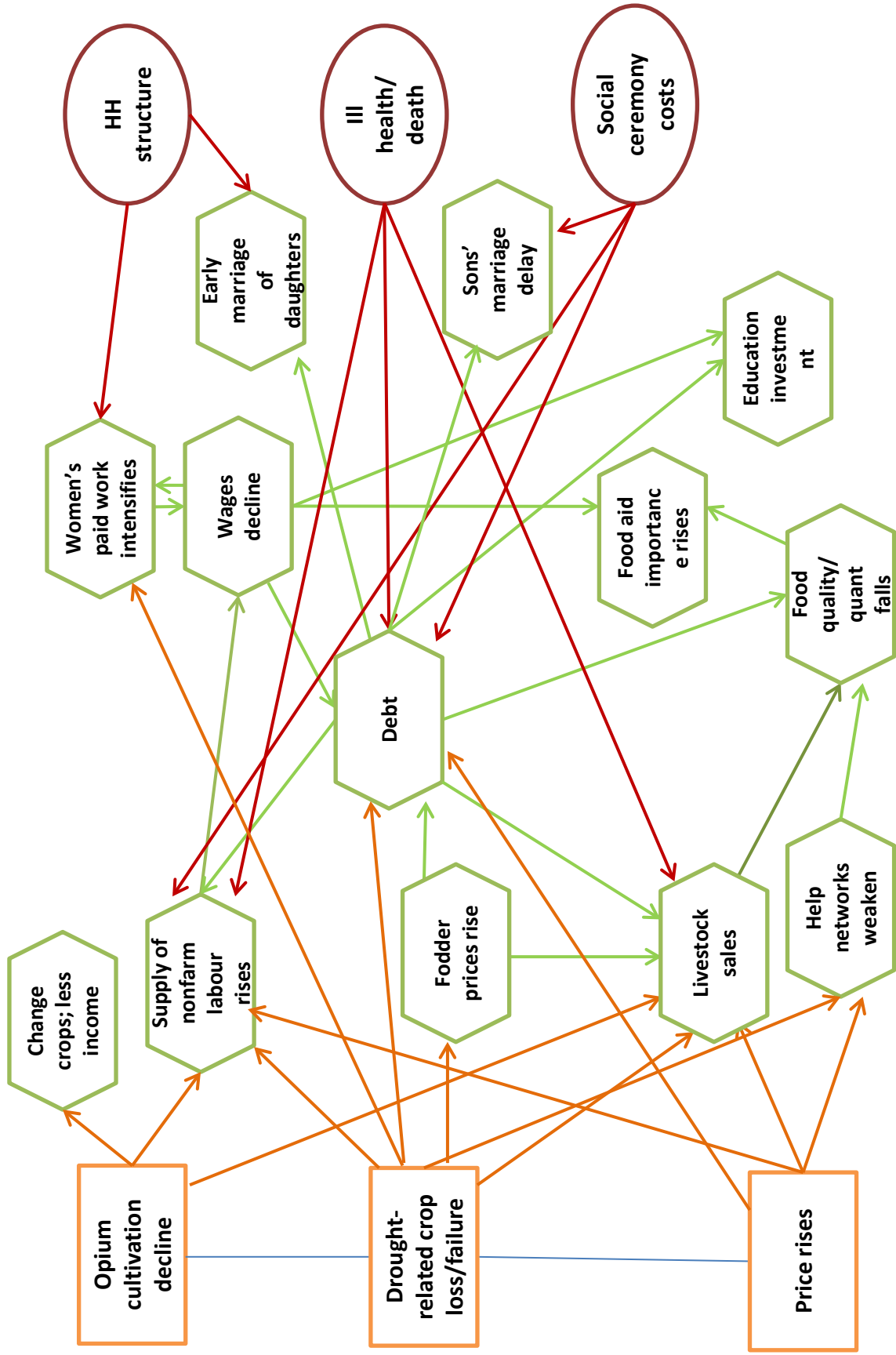
In the study villages where opium poppy was cultivated, local enforcement of the government-imposed ban led to reductions in income and consumption levels as households shifted out of opium poppy cultivation into other activities. For some this shift led to rising debt. The opium years enabled households to achieve food security but also buy consumer good and improve their quality of life. These benefits were enjoyed by everyone from landowners to sharecroppers and wage-labourers. In an economy newly flush with cash, shopkeeping also flourished. All of this reversed with the ban. While a few Badakhshan study households were able to cope or improve post-ban due to their levels of male labour, initial assets or access to salaried work, the majority fell into decline.

##### *Drought and price increases*

Starting in 2006, large parts of northern Afghanistan including the field sites in Badakhshan, Sar-i-Pul and Faryab suffered from a prolonged drought with increasingly severe effects,

45 Krishna, *One Illness Away*.

Figure 2: Factors leading to declining livelihood security in Badakhshan, Sar-i-Pul and Faryab





compounding the impact of the opium ban.<sup>46</sup> Crop yields declined year on year—by 2008, respondents from Sar-i-Pul and Faryab reported complete crop failure. Wood collected on common land for sale or fuel became increasingly scarce. Both of these trends forced households to depend increasingly on markets for food and fuel, making the effects of the 2008 rise in prices of staple goods catastrophic for some. Households in poorer wealth groups reported food rationing and cooking less often, often surviving primarily on bread and tea. Most households reported decline in the quality of their diets, eating meat and rice less often. Food aid obtained through food for work or training and school feeding programmes rose in importance for poorer households as the drought continued. Even wealthier households noted how their small land holdings, which barely produced enough to subsist on in good years, made surviving the drought even more difficult. In many cases these had eroded from generation to generation by inheritance divisions. Respondents also lost grain and fruit crops to pests at various points, especially as access to pesticides and other agricultural inputs became increasingly unaffordable. State or NGO distributions of these inputs were variable at best, often oriented to those with better assets (such as irrigated land or oxen) and at times accessed only through patronage links.

### **Ill-health**

All of the case households—improving, coping and declining—faced risks from ill-health, injuries and related costs. However, the difference between a problem and a catastrophe often lay in their ability to respond to them. Even relatively small-scale health events were still difficult for poor families to afford. For Esmatullah's poor household in Badakhshan (Shur Qul-33) the inability of the male head to work after falling ill from years of mining work led the household into steep decline. In extremely serious cases, health issues could also reverse the fortunes of relatively well-off households: A daughter's death from leukemia following treatment costing hundreds of thousands

of Afs led Najibullah's wealthier Badakhshan household (Kushlak-45) into economic crisis. Households coping with health costs resorted to borrowing, livestock sales, working more hours or having more members work (sometimes removing children from school to do so), and mortgaging or selling land. For poorer families there was some evidence of forgoing treatment due to prohibitive costs.

Treatment and travel costs are one barrier to care; treatment quality is another. Villagers highlighted two different dimensions here. One is the quality of medical practitioners' skills and of medicine received, and the other is perceived discrimination and ill-treatment by clinic staff. One woman from the marginal Sar-i-Pul village of Kushlak describes an encounter with a clinic worker in a neighbouring village after being bypassed by an entire queue of patients:

*He laughed and said "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.<sup>47</sup>*

Because of these issues, even some poorer households opted for private care, further increasing their cost burdens.

Household deaths due to illness or injuries were never without feelings of loss. However, in cases where earning members died or were disabled there also were dire consequences for livelihood security.<sup>48</sup> For example, Mujeeb's injury while travelling to trade opium six years ago triggered the decline of his household (Toghloq-65). The death of the male head of Feroza's household (Pishin-23) four years ago also started its decline. Coupled with the disability of the only adult son and his wife, this means the female head's earnings doing laundry for others and the daughter-in-

<sup>47</sup> See household Kushlak-05.

<sup>48</sup> For example, cases Sarband-00, Pishin-23, Pishin-26, Khilar-58, Toghloq-65, Shur Qul-27, Shur Qul-22, Khilar-43, Khilar-49, Julian-46, Julian-58, and Lalakai-00. See the provincial case studies for details.

<sup>46</sup> Faryab respondents reported earlier onset of drought conditions, which started in 2004.

-law's earnings from tailoring and teaching a short tailoring course are all that support the family. The son does seasonal brick-making work but cannot produce much because of his disability. He has been jobless in winter during the drought since the slim chance of finding day labour in Sar-i-Pul town is no longer worth the cost of travelling there. Borrowing to pay for a sick grandchild's healthcare has increased the family's debt burden further still.

### **Social events**

Funerals and marriages are two important opportunities for families to demonstrate their membership of the village community and maintain access to the support networks, patronage relations and other social resources membership offers. Households thus make considerable investments in ceremonies and the acts of charity and faith associated with them. However, the level of expenditure related to them can be debilitating and strategies to fund participation can negatively affect livelihood security. For example, households could spend between 10,000 and 50,000 Afs or more on funerals, while bride prices of 100,000 or 200,000 Afs were not uncommon. Often these social investments led to borrowing or sales of land and livestock, reflecting the value people placed on household reproduction and efforts to avoid the shame of a long engagement. Despite this, households in both Badakhshan and Sar-i-Pul reported delayed marriages and long engagements caused by their inability to raise the necessary funds during the drought. Other Sar-i-Pul households resorted to the less costly but undesirable option of exchange marriages. While bride prices declined compared to the opium years, particularly in Badakhshan, respondents also reported that increasing competition between households was still inflating prices above what many could afford. A few households did make some effort to limit spending on social events out of either principle or necessity. In Badakhshan, Khilar's village patron, the local commander Qutbuddin, apparently issued a decree to limit spending on marriages and other ceremonial events, but to no effect.

## **Coping strategies amid narrowing options**

### ***Labour diversification and migration***

The effects of drought and the opium cultivation ban decreased the availability of agricultural labour opportunities. The high demand for labour and correspondingly high wages of the opium cultivation period disappeared with the ban since other crops required less work and offered lower returns. Drought only worsened this. The end result was an increase in the number of people seeking nonfarm labour opportunities in an already weak job market. Labour migration, a livelihood strategy with a long history in Afghanistan, grew in importance. Some households in Sar-i-Pul sent men to the brickfields near Mazar-i-Sharif while in Badakhshan a number of young men joined the ANSF as a way to escape the lack of local opportunities. Some men quickly left the ANSF due to the rigors of training, and three households had sons killed or gravely injured. These were personal tragedies as well as economic shocks. In two of these cases, one involving a death and the other a loss of limb and expensive medical treatment, the complex claims process and interference by local powerholders left households without the cushion of a state martyrs' pension.

International labour migration was one of the most common responses to livelihood decline in Sar-i-Pul and Faryab but was reported to a lesser extent among Badakhshan households. In some cases migration was to Pakistan but more often it was to Iran where opportunities were thought to be better. However, entering Iran was more difficult and left people reliant on smugglers charging upwards of 30,000 Afs to get them across the border.<sup>49</sup> This came with significant risks as the case of Anjamuddin's household in Sar-i-Pul (Sarband-00) shows. The eldest son tried multiple times to enter Iran, either failing entirely or entering only to be deported just after repaying the smuggler's fee. He has 30,000 Afs debt due to one deportation experience and also reported being held by the Taliban in Nimroz Province

<sup>49</sup> Shaw, "Evidence from Sar-i-Pul"; Nezami with Kantor, "Evidence from Faryab."

and forced to work in a heroin processing plant. Similar experiences were not uncommon among other migrants, including being held for ransom by smugglers along the route. The men had to work off the smugglers' payment before being able to send money home. This led to considerable waiting periods and worry for family members in the villages. Where women were left on their own with children, they relied on extended family members to access markets. These myriad risks did not stop families relying on migration, and some who had once been sceptical were increasingly prepared to accept it as a last resort.

By 2008, the last year of drought, the gap between the supply and demand of nonfarm workers widened, in part due to the added effect of higher staple food prices. The widening gap led to decreasing wages. Some respondent households with males in Iran or Pakistan reported that there were fewer and lower quality work opportunities in both places, making migration less profitable. Similarly, those working in the brickfields experienced a drop in earnings while facing rising costs of food and housing, leaving them with less money left to send home. It was this crunch that most affected Fahima's household in Badakhshan (Kushlak-51), which had previously been protected from the drought downturn by its cohort of many male workers and livelihood activities, including brick making, that were independent of the land.

### *Access to male labour*

Household size and composition played a role in determining how hard the deprivations of recent years hit households. The age of family members also affected households' exposure to age-related health risks and marriage pressures. The most important considerations across all households' ability to cope with the downturn were the amount of male labour and number of dependents. Multiple male workers enabled diversification into different agricultural activities, nonfarm activities, or across both. In many cases the presence of multiple male workers opened up labour migration as an option, before the downturn, as in the case of Fahima's household, as well as in response to it. Because of

the uncertainties involved, only a few households sent their only male adult to migrate.

However, access to male labour is by no means a guaranteed path to livelihood security since the quality and range of options available limit the benefits it brings. Islamuddin's Sar-i-Pul household (Kushlak-52) demonstrates this with its seven members, including three male workers. It only has rainfed land which has been unproductive for the last four years. Two sons have been engaged in various contract labour arrangements with wealthier villagers or relatives for the past few years. One was dismissed from a contract position due to lack of work and the other recently left his to try to find work in Iran; his employer refused to pay him for the four of six months worked since he did not complete the full period. Islamuddin himself collects and sells firewood. The irregularity, low earnings and dependence characterising the work opportunities available meant the household's male members were unable to earn an adequate living despite their numbers; this led the household to marry one daughter last year at age 15 to secure a 100,000 Afs bride price. By comparison, in Yakin and Shafiq's Kandahar households, one worker involved in the urban economy was enough to support small increases in livelihood security.

While access to able-bodied male labour does not guarantee better livelihood opportunities and outcomes, it still provides more choices than available to those respondents without this resource. The case of Abdul Hakim's Sar-i-Pul household (Pishin-32) illustrates this. Abdul Hakim is older and has two wives, three young daughters still at home, three daughters married and no sons. The family's lack of male labour has forced it to rely on irreversible and damaging coping methods to survive the drought. Abdul Hakim has already sold land and livestock and will continue to do so to survive, while his three daughters were married early for a total bride price of 570,000 Afs.<sup>50</sup> The household currently survives on the

<sup>50</sup> The use of marriage as a means of household survival was not uncommon; Islamuddin mentioned above as well as households Pishin-21, Kushlak-53 and Lalakai-00 reported using this response to cope with economic decline. See the provincial case studies for details.

proceeds of the land and livestock sales and bride price. With such limited resources, it is unable to rely on mutual support mechanisms like informal credit because of its inability to reciprocate. It also receives less charity since the entire village is poorer after the drought. The family was reduced to relying on food aid from two female members' participation in a literacy course to help sustain it through 2009. This is a household in a highly precarious position, dependent on selling off its future to survive the demands of the present.

Household divisions affected the coping ability of some respondent households. While division of joint families led to households with fewer dependents and less internal conflicts for some, for others it led to increased livelihood insecurity. This was the case for Hikmatullah's Badakhshan household (Toghloq-75); six sons left the joint family leading Hikmatullah to divide his land and livestock assets and provide each a home, depleting his resources in the process. Amanullah (Shur Qul-23)'s educated eldest son, a school headmaster with a salary, split from his father's household due to internal conflict. This left the elderly head as the only provider since another son is at college. It survives by selling wood from its garden to pay for college fees and selling livestock for daily needs. Its herd now depleted, it pins its hopes on the willingness of the son currently in college to return to the village, find work and be willing to support his parents and remaining family members.

### **Female labour**

The contribution of women's work cannot be overlooked. During this period of increasing livelihood insecurity, women's activities grew in importance as both a source of cash income and a stopgap as households waited for remittances. In Badakhshan there were some reports of women weaving *gilims* (flat carpets), but more often for the family than for sale. In Sar-i-Pul women's wool spinning and shawl weaving were key activities, while women in Faryab wove *qalins*, *gilims* and *palas* (all types of carpet). However, none of these options were particularly attractive in terms of either conditions or earnings. Employment

relations in carpet weaving have shifted in favour of more powerful traders over the last few decades, meaning few still weave independently. Most work for subcontractors for half of a predetermined market price (receiving about US \$300 for six months work in the case of *qalins*).<sup>51</sup> Women reported that the difficult work involved in carpet weaving and the low returns meant that for all but the most poor this was an activity only resorted to in times of economic crisis.

Many women in the Sar-i-Pul households also spun wool for traders. As with nonfarm labour for men, earnings per weight of spun wool declined as the market became saturated with women in urgent need of cash income; as the drought continued, the going rate per *pau* (half-kilo) dropped from 10 to 7 Afs. In many cases, the pressures of housework and childcare meant women could spin only a *pau* per day. While this could not provide livelihood stability, it did at least keep the family stocked with soap, tea and children's school supplies. In a few cases, women worked in others' homes doing laundry or cleaning; these women often had few other options because working outside the home was not generally acceptable. Other women earned through tailoring and could use this skill or the ability to read to obtain short term earnings leading NGO courses. The latter were better paid but often accessible largely through patronage.

### **Livestock sales**

Decreasing land yields led to increasing reliance on livestock sales among landowners, sharecroppers and wage-labourers alike. In early stages of the drought livestock were buffers against consumption reductions, sold to meet food needs, repay debts or meet household costs. Wealthier households could better afford this though some with large numbers of dependents or buffeted by additional crises went into steep decline, selling significant portions of their flocks.<sup>52</sup> Natural increase made livestock sales less irreversible than other responses, but as drought conditions

51 Nezami with Kantor, "Evidence from Faryab."

52 See Kushlak-56, Sarband-19 and Khilar-58 in the associated case studies.



continued and fodder became less available and more expensive, respondents reported fewer or no births each year. Livestock sales, including of oxen, became more frequent as the cost of keeping animals rose, and most were sold at significant losses. Coupled with crop failures in 2008, this meant many landowners and sharecroppers had no inputs to kick-start cultivation when the rains came in 2009, especially in Sar-i-Pul.

### *Informal credit and charity*

The opium cultivation ban, drought and rising food prices all led to increasing debt burdens for many respondent households. Most families reported buying food on credit from shopkeepers as their reliance on the market increased. In the villages of Sarband and Khilar in Sar-i-Pul and Badakhshan, this credit was given with interest. Accepted measures of household creditworthiness included the size of its livestock herd, and having a son in Iran. Households viewed maintaining creditworthiness and the access to mutual support networks it enabled as key to securing both their basic needs and additional support for health events and social ceremonies.<sup>53</sup> However, some reported losing creditworthiness over the course of the drought as they depleted their land and livestock herds.

Two of the poorest respondent households had few workers and actively avoided borrowing due to their inability to repay. As discussed above, Abdul Hakim's household survived from land sales and daughters' marriages, while Najeem's household in Badakhshan (Shur Qul-27) survived on proceeds from a land sale, food aid and charity. Many households across study villages observed that charitable donations have become smaller and more scarce in recent years, making this a precarious source of support. This decline may be partially due to the drought, since levels reportedly improved with the good rains of 2009. It also might reflect growing concerns for household over collective needs as modernisation processes affect village life.

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53 See Kantor and Pain, "Securing Life and Livelihoods."

### *Education investments*

Section 3 showed that there were differences in access to education facilities across the study villages, with access in Badakhshan generally better than in Sar-i-Pul or Kandahar, except for Khilar village. The better and longer-term access characterising Badakhshan has translated into a greater determination to educate both male and female children. Even among very poor households most if not all children were in school. This is in part due to the presence of food aid, but a number of respondent households from Badakhshan clearly articulated the growing importance of education as a form of future livelihood security. In some cases this was reflected in the presence of role models in the village who used education to gain salaried work. As Qadir, the head of household Shur Qul-36, observed:

*We saw that some people in the village used to have a lot of sheep, but have since lost them all. However, if they were literate, their literacy remained with them. So we realised that education is the best thing.*

This recognition was not as evident in Sar-i-Pul, even though its rural economy is equally precarious. This may be due to the absence of role models to translate the possibilities of education into a more tangible reality. In Kandahar social norms and insecurity were barriers to educating children for many households.

## **4.4 Conclusion**

Overall, the evidence from the declining households illustrates that the types of household-specific risks they faced—ill-health, deaths, large social expenditures—did not differ from those faced by the improving and coping households. Instead, the overarching effects of the opium ban, drought and rising food prices created an environment which left households little room to manoeuvre in their responses to them. The depth of decline was affected by the extent of reliance on land- and livestock-based activities and access to male labour enabling diversification, compounded to a greater or lesser degree by household-specific events. However, the irregularity and low quality of alternative opportunities, even in Iran and Pakistan, reduced the usefulness of diversification. As Mohammad

Ibrahim of Pishin noted, life became characterised by needing to work harder, eat less and take on more debt.<sup>54</sup>

This analysis of the various factors driving improvement, decline and stability of rural livelihood security has identified openings where social protection policy and programming could help reduce exposure to and the effects of economic and

social sources of risk. These include agricultural variability and viability, diversification and quality of nonfarm employment opportunities, financial services, ill-health and social ceremony expenditures, education, and social assistance and aid delivery. The next section discusses potential for intervention in these areas under a framework of protective, preventive, promotive and transformative forms of social protection.

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54 Pishin-29

## 5. Improving Rural Livelihood Security

This section identifies openings where social protection policy, either independently or channelled through agriculture and rural development (ARD) policy, could assist rural households to achieve greater livelihood security. Based on the case evidence in Section 4, it discusses six areas for intervention, outlining the social and economic risks involved, highlighting the successes and failures of existing attempts to tackle them, and identifying ways forward for policymakers.

### 5.1 Agricultural variability and viability

Of all 19 improving households, only one was able to achieve their position through an agriculture-based livelihood (i.e. one based on farming, livestock rearing, or off-farm agricultural processing activities). This raises serious questions over the viability of agriculture as a means to escape poverty in its own right. For the large majority of study households, a complex and increasing burden of risks left families finding it harder and harder to make even the most basic of livings from the land.

#### *Land-based risks*

Constraints related to land size and ownership concentration limit the viability of agriculture as a means to sustain a living for many people, let alone as a route out of poverty. Inheritance practices that divide and subdivide land and livestock holdings over generations mean land sizes are declining.<sup>55</sup> This trend, coupled with large household sizes, means it is likely to become more difficult to achieve land-based food security in future. In fact under current land ownership conditions only one study household in Badakhshan and six in Sar-i-Pul reported achieving grain self-sufficiency from their land (owned or sharecropped) in a normal agricultural year. Land quality in these mountainous areas as well as lack of irrigation infrastructure compound the challenges of

small land size. There is scope here for programme designers and local communities to explore methods of joint cultivation and resource-sharing across such fragmented landholdings. These must develop based on local recognition of their value and not be imposed by external state or non state actors.

The more significant land-based risk in Kandahar, which had largely avoided the effects of drought and the opium ban, was the concentration of landholdings and the power imbalances they produced. With land in the hands of a few wealthier and often predatory landlords, the terms of sharecrop arrangements there were generally unequal and insecure from the perspective of land-poor and landless farmers. In villages such as Khilar in Badakhshan, where there were more landowners offering sharecrop land, this imbalance was less extreme. With more land available to sharecrop, the landless and land-poor had more ability to opt out of unfavourable arrangements in an effort to find a better situation. The improving and coping households from Kandahar's Lalakai village were classified as such partly because they had avoided or moved out of dependent relationships with the main landlord. Although they were still vulnerable to other risks, they had at least achieved a measure of autonomy. Assisting others to make a similar move could improve their security, but a lasting solution will require a conscious challenge to existing concentrations of power to open more options to all village residents. Encouraging greater organisation among farmers and marginalised groups will play a critical role, but in many cases transformation must also be promoted in consultation with existing elites, to gain their support and buy in.

#### *Shared risks and responses: drought and the poppy cultivation ban*

Other sources of risk for those pursuing a livelihood based wholly or in part on agricultural activities come from factors that are out of their hands. Weather conditions like the multi-year drought experienced in the North, the opium poppy

<sup>55</sup> Krishna also identified land division as a factor limiting the potential of agriculture to be a means of moving out of poverty. See Krishna, *One Illness Away*.

cultivation ban and global food price fluctuations set the scene for a severe downturn in the rural economy. This triggered a complex series of knock-on effects and vicious cycles whose effects will likely be felt long after the initial period of crisis. The prevalence of rainfed lands and lack of irrigation infrastructure made the drought more difficult to cope with for many households.<sup>56</sup> Far from a rarity, dry spells are a part of agricultural life in Afghanistan, as the country's Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy notes. Respondents across the Sar-i-Pul and Badakhshan sites noted how there may have been only three or four good years of production since Karzai came to power.<sup>57</sup> Policymakers must therefore find ways to limit their potential to wreak havoc on rural lives, either through preventive means such as improving irrigation infrastructure, or through support structures such as insurance schemes to prevent reductions in consumption when losses do occur.

Driven by politics, the ban on opium cultivation decimated village and household economies as the Badakhshan case study vividly illustrated.<sup>58</sup> The failure to accompany the ban with any coherent attempt to cushion its effects on the local economy has led to considerable disaffection with the government. So too has the perceived failure of state and aid actors in delivering promised aid once provinces were able to demonstrate their "poppy-free" status. In addition to undermining government legitimacy, this approach risks a return to opium poppy cultivation as soon as the terms of trade between wheat and poppy shift in favour of the latter.<sup>59</sup>

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56 A study conducted by Altai Consulting for the World Bank identified lack of irrigation water as a constraint to the potential for households to escape poverty through agriculture. See Altai Consulting, "Moving out of Poverty."

57 Government of Afghanistan (GoA), "Agriculture and Rural Development Sector Strategy" (Kabul: GoA, 2008).

58 Pain, "Evidence from Badakhshan"

59 For more on the opium poppy issue see David Mansfield and Adam Pain, "Opium Poppy Eradication: How to Raise Risk When There Is Nothing to Lose?" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2006); David Mansfield and Adam Pain, "Evidence from the Field: Understanding Changing Levels of Opium Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2006).

### *Limits to input delivery and accessibility*

Plant diseases, pests and livestock diseases were other sources of crop or livestock loss affecting respondent households, including those in the improving and coping categories. Lack of or unreliable access to agricultural inputs including veterinary care made these risks real for many households.<sup>60</sup> Some respondents reported that they received improved seeds or fertiliser from the state or NGOs. However, their distribution tended to be in less than needed quantities, unsuitable for local conditions (e.g. fertiliser requiring high water use), and uncoordinated such that inputs generally were not delivered together.<sup>61</sup> Case evidence also showed that input distribution could be hijacked by local patronage networks. Availability of inputs therefore did not mean they were equally accessible to all who qualified. In addition, input distribution often did not consider the needs of those most at risk of food insecurity—small-scale farmers of rainfed land without draught animals. In general, state or NGO provision of inputs was limited and, particularly in the North as the drought continued and prices rose, many farmers were unable to afford to purchase them in the market. Once the drought ceased in 2009, the resulting dearth of seeds and oxen left households in a weak position to recover. Improving input delivery is an important strategy to promote improved livelihood outcomes, but any efforts to do so also must find ways to prevent access from being distorted along the fault lines of village power structures. If input delivery programmes are to be pro-poor, they must address the needs of the people they target, with a focus on affordability, use on

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60 Altai Consulting, "Moving out of Poverty" identified lack of access to seeds and fertiliser as another constraint to the potential for households to escape poverty through agriculture. See also Christoplos, "Out of Step?"

61 Studies of constraints on the productivity of small farms identify poor coordination of input delivery (such as finance, land, labour, water, seeds and fertiliser) along with links to markets as a major problem. See Peter Hazell, Colin Poulton, Steve Wiggins and Andrew Dorward, "The Future of Small Farms: Trajectories and Policy Priorities," *World Development* 38, no. 10 (2010): 1349-61; Colin Poulton, Andrew Dorward and Jonathan Kydd, "The Future of Small Farms: New Directions for Services, Institutions, and Intermediation," *World Development* 38, no. 10 (2010): 1413-28. They do not acknowledge social constraints in relation to delivery as part of the problem. Programmes must therefore ensure availability translates into access for all who need them by engaging with village social hierarchies as well.

rained land or in conditions of water scarcity, and delivery of bundles of inputs along with securing people's access to draught animals so the inputs can be used.

### **Market risks**

An increasing need to engage in markets caused many respondents considerable strain. The few large raisin producers among Kandahar respondents had sufficient connections and market power to negotiate favourable terms. Most were not so fortunate. For example, in Badakhshan remoteness and poor transport links meant there was no way to sell a surplus in apple production. Unlike the case of opium sales, the market no longer came to the farm. Drought-driven livestock price fluctuations, driven by mass distress sales, led many to despair at ever recovering lost herds. Sales occurred when markets were flooded and livestock were underweight due to lack of fodder; in 2009 when rains improved prices bounced back to pre-drought levels, leaving households with finances decimated by recent shocks unable to reinvest. Many respondents felt consistently disadvantaged in market transactions.

Respondents' concerns about market interaction were most extreme when it came to purchasing food to meet production shortfalls. Coupled with other constraints, the fear of relying on the market for basic food requirements means many farm households prioritise subsistence production.<sup>62</sup> Data from the Government of Afghanistan's National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) for 2007/08 support this. It found that 44 percent of rural Afghans report agriculture as a primary income source and 54 percent of these households farm for household consumption.<sup>63</sup> This raises questions about the focus of agriculture policy in the country. While noting the need to assure food security, a primary focus of the government's

62 Alan Roe, "Water, Opium and Livestock: Resources Management, Farming Systems and Rural Livelihoods" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2008); Lorene Flaming and Alan Roe, "Opportunities for Pro-Poor Agricultural Growth" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2009).

63 Government of Afghanistan (GoA), *Poverty Status in Afghanistan* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2010).

current ARD strategy is on improving production for markets and supporting market development. This transition may require substituting market for subsistence production, implying an increased reliance on the market for people's basic food needs. The findings of this study and other AREU research suggest that many are unlikely to welcome this shift due to a deep-seated mistrust of the market as it currently operates.<sup>64</sup> In fact, securing wheat access after the 2008 food price rise was identified as one reason why farmers planted wheat instead of opium poppy on newly-cultivated lands in Helmand in 2009.<sup>65</sup> Food security is thus a strong motivator.

Agriculture policy must acknowledge that farmers have different interests and willingness to risk market engagement. Therefore, agriculture development strategies must do more to meet the needs of both market producers and subsistence farmers. For the latter, policies must first reduce perceived risks to food security, through improving the productivity of staple crops or providing crop insurance that protects against the effects of crop loss. The resulting increased security may then improve the willingness of subsistence farming households to take up new market-oriented opportunities, as suited to local conditions.<sup>66</sup>

### **Approaches to improve agricultural viability**

Table 2 provides a summary of policy approaches which can assist in improving the viability of agricultural activities. Divided into the four categories of social protection discussed in Section 2, they include: developing and testing insurance products to help protect against crop loss (see section 5.3); improving the coordinated delivery of inputs in ways accessible to a wide range of farmers; focusing on labour intensity of productivity

64 Flaming and Roe, "Pro-Poor Agricultural Growth"; Christoplos, "Out of Step?"

65 David Mansfield, "Where Have All the Flowers Gone? Assessing the Sustainability of Current Opium Production Reductions" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2010).

66 Rebecca Holmes, John Farrington and Rachel Slater, "Social Protection and Growth: The Case of Agriculture," *IDS Bulletin* 38, no. 3 (2007): 95-100.



**Table 2: Policy options to reduce risks associated with agricultural output variability**

<i>Intervention</i>	<i>Social protection orientation</i>
Test options for insurance products protecting against crop loss, market variability: orient to needs of both subsistence and market producers	Prevent
Improve outreach and inclusiveness of programmes delivering agriculture inputs: accessible to poorer farmers and sharecroppers; orient to subsistence producer needs; suit needs of rainfed and irrigated land cultivators; deliver complementary inputs together	Promote
Explore conditions where informal asset sharing (draught power) can be formalised to improve security of access	Promote
Prioritise labour-intensive means of enhancing agriculture productivity	Promote
Explore existing or new opportunities to promote joint production of small plots	Promote
Test the potential for collective organisations to improve bargaining power, market positions of sharecroppers, agricultural workers	Promote; transform
For market producers, identify conditions under which associations can lead to better market access and market power	Promote; transform

improvements to avoid large employment losses through mechanisation; and exploring successful means of collective organisation for farmers, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers to improve their bargaining power. The government and NGOs all have a role in delivering these interventions, but they must also be supported by donors aware of the need to place risk reduction front and centre in efforts to maximise agriculture's contribution to Afghanistan's development.

## 5.2 Limits of diversification into nonfarm employment

While agriculture is a risky livelihood strategy given climatic conditions, weak infrastructure and input provision, and inequalities in resource access, nonfarm employment does not provide a significantly better option for the majority. While most improving and coping households have reduced their dependence on agriculture by diversifying into nonfarm employment, a similar strategy failed to work for many declining households. The limited quantity and quality of employment opportunities available to respondent households in the drought affected areas constrained the potential

of nonfarm employment to be a way out of poverty. Remoteness compounds these conditions. Distance, lack of resources, poor access to markets and powerlessness associated with poverty mean that the basis for a strong nonfarm economy is limited at best in remote areas. In such cases interventions aimed at improving people's capacity to diversify may bring little in the way of tangible improvements, as Esmatullah's wife (household Shur Qul-33) notes:

*I knit socks and gloves for people. They provide the thread and I knit but they don't pay me a wage. I can't say anything because they themselves have no feelings. Skills in such remote areas can never be helpful...It is difficult to use one's skills in areas far away from main cities, where people don't have jobs except owning a little land and some livestock.*

These concerns are borne out by 2007/08 National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA), which suggests a general failure of nonfarm diversification to lift rural households out of poverty across Afghanistan (Table 3).

Rural households are highly diversified, reporting on average 2.3 different income sources compared to 1.4

**Table 3: Diversification and poverty rates by main income source**

<i>Main income source</i>	<i>Average no. of income sources</i>	<i>Household poverty rates</i>
Subsistence farming	2.5	34.7
Market farming	2.5	28.4
Agriculture wage labour	2.1	36.8
Nonfarm wage labour	2.0	38.3
Trade, craft, transport	2.1	28.7
Transfers	2.8	42.4
Other	2.0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>35.8</b>

Source: GoA, NRVA 2007/08

for urban households.<sup>67</sup> Households reporting farming for market or domestic consumption or transfers<sup>68</sup> as primary income sources had higher than average numbers of activities.<sup>69</sup> However, diversification does not guarantee livelihood security. Across all main income sources except trade, craft and transport, rural households with more economic activities had higher average poverty head count rates. This shows that poverty necessitates diversification. The poor quality of nonfarm employment is clear from the poverty data in Table 3. Households reporting nonfarm labour as their primary income source had the second highest rural poverty incidence. The inability of rural nonfarm labour to deliver improved livelihood security to more Afghans is linked to the conditions under which it occurs. Therefore, while the World Bank and others recommend a strategy of mixed portfolios of farming and nonfarm labour activities, including migration, in order to increase income and define a “pathway out of poverty,”<sup>70</sup> evidence from this study, supported by 2007/08 NRVA data, demonstrates that diversification under

existing conditions in rural Afghanistan does not provide a way out of poverty.<sup>71</sup>

### **Distress diversification**

For the rural nonfarm economy to provide opportunities that reduce poverty, there needs to be an engine of growth to support it and the opportunities it presents must be accessible to the poor.<sup>72</sup> When the agricultural economy is dynamic and incomes are rising, agriculture can provide the basis for growth in the nonfarm economy, boosting the demand for services, transport and (where they are competitive with imports) manufactured goods.<sup>73</sup> Badakhshan during the opium boom is a strong example of this process. However, the conditions in Badakhshan and Sar-i-Pul after the cultivation ban and during the drought demonstrate the limits of the rural nonfarm economy when demand for goods and services is low and wages are declining. These factors, along with population growth and smaller landholdings, drove households to seek nonfarm

67 GoA, *Poverty Status*.

68 Transfers include remittances, pensions, government benefits, rental income, sale of food aid, begging and borrowing.

69 GoA, *Poverty Status*.

70 World Bank, *Agriculture for Development* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2007); Cook, “Structural Change.”

71 GoA, *Poverty Status*.

72 Steven Haggblade, Peter Hazell and Thomas Reardon, “The Rural Non-farm Economy: Prospects for Growth and Poverty Reduction,” *World Development* 38, no. 10 (2010): 1429-41.

73 Haggblade, Hazell and Reardon, “Rural Non-farm Economy.”

employment for lack of alternative options.<sup>74</sup> This is distress-based diversification, which is more likely to be precarious and exploitative than diversification motivated by new opportunities to prosper.<sup>75</sup>

It is this kind of diversification that characterises the declining study households. This is evident in the generally low-skilled and low-paid types of work people resorted to, such as day labour, making bricks, loading trucks, collecting and selling firewood, or spinning wool. Workers were prepared to take higher risks or submit themselves to dependent relations

Women's contribution to household livelihoods in Sar-i-Pul and Faryab increased in importance during the economic decline. However, gender norms defining the types and places of work acceptable for women limited how far women's economic activities could contribute to diversification strategies.

to secure a source of income. Such jobs regularly featured exploitative arrangements favouring employers, who held the keys to desperately-needed work in an already saturated employment market. Lack of skills or connections and gender norms further limited choices. This scenario was seen across agriculture wage work and sharecropping as well as nonfarm wage work, among Kandahar's powerless sharecroppers, in the terms of work for female carpet-weavers, and in the widespread dependence on labour contractors and people smugglers across villages in the North.

#### **Limited options: urban and international labour markets**

The urban informal economy provided a valuable employment avenue for some Kandahari case households. However, the gains were small and they that did not set the families on secure upward

74 Haggbalde, Hazell and Reardon, "Rural Non-farm Economy."

75 Kay, "Development Strategies."

trajectories.<sup>76</sup> Instead, irregularity of work, low returns, lack of capital, uncertain access to space to vend, and potential for exploitation by officials constrained their efforts. These characteristics of urban opportunities call for efforts to develop urban services and decent employment opportunities in the urban informal economy.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, the case evidence shows that conditions in neighbouring countries are worsening economically and politically, and that the risks of entering Iran in particular are high. International labour migration was less often a means of improving livelihood security than of coping or survival, demonstrating the need to regulate international labour migration and protect migrants. These barriers highlight the need to extend the horizons of rural development efforts to areas well beyond the village. Improving the quality of urban jobs and services and poor people's readiness for them, as well as working to protect and formalise the rights of international migrants may in many cases do more to strengthen rural livelihoods than efforts to develop the rural economy in marginal agro-ecological areas.

#### **Limited options: female labour**

Women's contribution to household livelihoods in Sar-i-Pul and Faryab increased in importance during the economic decline. However, gender norms defining the types and places of work acceptable for women limited how far women's economic activities could contribute to diversification strategies. The concentration of women within few available activities combined with their lack of organisation and bargaining power reduced their earnings levels. Therefore, these gender norms constrain the aspirations and achievements of women, negatively impacting household livelihood security and general economic potential. They also place the well-being of women and girls directly under threat in households lacking male workers by jeopardising their food security and pushing many to marry their daughters at a young age for bride price, apparently more acceptable according to village norms than having women work outside of the home. However,

76 Krishna found the same in his multi-country study *One Illness Away*; the urban informal economy supported small improvements.

77 Kabeer, "Safety Nets"; Krishna, *One Illness Away*.



**Table 4: Policy options to improve quality of nonfarm employment opportunities**

<i>Intervention</i>	<i>Social protection orientation</i>
Expand provision of economic infrastructure (roads, communications, electricity) to both low and high potential areas	Promote
Promote collective organisations to improve workers' voice/negotiating power; include separate efforts for women workers; focus both on urban and rural areas	Promote; transform
Advocate for minimum wage legislation, informal sector labour code to document worker rights: involve workers to build cohesion, organising skills	Promote; transform
Continue to improve the national skills development programme's ability to: reach poorer clients; match training to current and future opportunities (extractive industries); enhance training quality	Promote
Design outreach campaigns to deliver appropriate messages about the benefits of women's economic contributions through household and paid work	Transform
Continue efforts to gain bilateral labour migration agreements with Iran and Pakistan to manage flows and protect migrants	Protect; promote
Invest in urban planning (services, housing, jobs) to anticipate rising numbers of rural-urban migrants	Promote; protect

increasing pressures of economic need may be expanding the space for change, as the female head of Sarband-00 notes:

*The mullah also said on the loudspeaker not to let women go out of their homes or to the city... But the people didn't accept this. If the mullah would bring food, clothes for my child, sugar and everything we need, because now my husband is not with me, then I would accept his idea! The mullah's stomach is full, so he doesn't know about the people's problems.*

### **Policy approaches to improve diversification options**

The evidence on the limits of diversification as a means to improve livelihood security and reduce poverty highlight the need for policymakers to give attention not just to creating more jobs but also better quality jobs.<sup>78</sup> They also need to develop coordinated strategies including education and skills

78 Kabeer, "Safety Nets."

development to enable the poor, who are more likely to diversify out of agriculture on the least positive terms, to benefit.<sup>79</sup> Programmes seeking to promote rural enterprise development need to recognise that existing conditions may not always be able to support a growth-oriented rural off-farm and nonfarm sector that can benefit the poor. In more remote regions, this may require a shift in strategy to promoting more viable labour migration options. In others, more work must be done to provide households with stable incomes and freedom from uncertainty before targeting growth-oriented strategies that offer better returns at higher risk.<sup>80</sup> For women and the landless, there must also be a greater focus on overcoming social constraints on access to resources or markets.

Table 4 provides a range of interventions geared toward improving the quality of opportunities

79 Tania Murray Li, "Exit from Agriculture: a step forward or a step backward for the rural poor?" *Journal of Peasant Studies* 36, no.3 (2009): 629-36.

80 Haggblade, Hazell and Reardon, "Rural Non-farm Economy."

outside of farming. Those focused on community-level actions are most appropriate for civil society leadership. For the government, priorities should include improving the pace and quality of economic infrastructure investments, enacting legislative changes on workers' rights, setting quality standards for national programmes, envisioning and implementing a joint rural-urban development strategy and protecting Afghans seeking work abroad.

### 5.3 Financial services

Backed up by previous AREU research, the cases here demonstrate that most households had access to credit from informal sources like family, neighbours and shopkeepers.<sup>81</sup> For example, average debt levels for the Sar-i-Pul households were 45,000 Afs or US \$900. Some were able to access very high levels for investments but most often these amounts were for marriages or severe health events. Others avoided debt because they were wealthy enough to do so or because they knew their economic position did not enable them to repay. But for many households in the drought-hit areas, credit increasingly became a way of life.

#### *Credit risks*

While credit was available and clearly important to tiding households over either in times of crisis or in response to the normal seasonal variations of rural life, it did not appear to be a means of reducing risk. It was not clear that the returns of farm and nonfarm rural economic activities were high enough to support repayment of cost-free informal credit, let alone microcredit with fees.<sup>82</sup> For households in decline or struggling to cope, credit may not be the correct instrument to support poverty reduction and may end up increasing vulnerability as repayment

81 Floortje Klijn and Adam Pain, "Finding the Money" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2007); Kantor, "From Access to Impact."

82 Hugh Allen, "Finance Begins with Savings," in *What's Wrong with Microfinance?* ed. Thomas Dichter and Malcolm Harper, 49-59 (Rugby, UK: Practical Action Publishing, 2007); Malcolm Harper, "Microfinance and Farmers: Do They Fit?" in *What's Wrong with Microfinance?* ed. Thomas Dichter and Malcolm Harper, 83-94 (Rugby, UK: Practical Action Publishing, 2007); Kantor, "From Access to Impact."

absorbs funds that could be used for agricultural inputs, education or other investments.<sup>83</sup>

#### *Gaps in access: savings and insurance products*

The case evidence demonstrates a clear need for financial services that can improve rural households' ability to manage risk.<sup>84</sup> This means making access to savings and insurance products a priority over extending credit coverage. This gap is recognised in the government's social protection sector strategy, which recommends developing community-based savings schemes and insurance to cushion against failing harvests.<sup>85</sup> However, these recommendations remain just that.

To date, priorities of existing microfinance institutions and regulatory bodies are skewed overwhelmingly in favour of credit. Microcredit offered through the Microfinance Investment Support Facility of Afghanistan (MISFA) has focused on promoting growth through access to credit for productive purposes. It has also largely focused on urban and periurban locations.<sup>86</sup> It is currently expanding into rural areas and developing loan products suited to rural livelihood activities, and its main priority is to strengthen microcredit delivery practices with the aim of achieving sustainability. While valuable for urban clients, this approach may not be what rural residents most need. The Afghan National Development Strategy's proposed rural credit facility (the Afghan Development Fund) tells a similar story, making no mention of even exploring pilot attempts to deliver alternative financial services to rural households. MISFA did investigate demand for savings among clients and the preparedness of existing microfinance institutions (MFIs) to take on the challenge of expanding into a wider range of financial services, but found that numerous obstacles

83 Christoplos, *Out of Step?*; Kabeer, "Safety Nets."

84 Poulton, Dorward and Kydd, "Services, Institutions and Intermediation"; Kabeer, "Safety Nets."

85 Government of Afghanistan (GoA), *Social Protection Sector Strategy* (Kabul: GoA, 2008).

86 Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan (MISFA), "Afghanistan's Microfinance Sector: Gearing Up to Expand Its Rural Outreach," *Microfinance Times* Issue 19 (2010): 1-5.

**Table 5: Policy options to improve the financial services sector's risk reduction potential**

<i>Intervention</i>	<i>Social protection orientation</i>
Make required regulatory/legal environment changes to facilitate expansion of financial services provided	Prevent
Develop more rural savings opportunities; use groups as a means of building solidarity	Prevent; transform
Pilot programmes offering insurance products covering production and consumption risks	Prevent
Provide education programmes as needed to build knowledge on the role and function of insurance programmes	Prevent
Ensure rural credit programmes learn from and complement existing informal credit systems	Prevent

to this remain.<sup>87</sup> It seems to be a case of the needs of the sector and its actors outweighing those of rural clients.<sup>88</sup>

In the current climate, more needs to be done to raise awareness of the benefits of savings and insurance, adjust the regulatory environment and improve MFI capacity to move the rural financial services sector beyond credit.

### **Approaches to improve risk reduction orientation of financial services**

Acting on the social protection sector strategy's recommendations to expand existing financial services to include savings and crop insurance products is important to improving rural livelihood security. However, designing and delivering agricultural insurance programmes will not be easy, as experience elsewhere has shown.<sup>89</sup> The programmes need to be structured to ensure that subsistence farmers as well as more market-oriented producers have access to protection should their

87 MISFA, "Assessing the Demand for Savings Services among Microfinance Clients in Afghanistan" (Kabul: MISFA, 2009); Personal communication, MISFA staff, 18 Oct 2010.

88 Geoff Wood and Iffath Sharif, "Introduction," In *Who Needs Credit? Poverty and Finance in Bangladesh*, edited by Geoffrey Wood and Iffath Sharif, 27-58. (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 1997).

89 Poulton, Dorward and Kydd, "Services, Institutions and Intermediation."

crops fail.<sup>90</sup> They also need to cover losses on both farmer-owned and sharecropped land, with protection for the cultivator as well as the landowner in the case of the latter. Any such programme will also need to review existing global practices to establish the best fit for Afghanistan's institutional, social and economic contexts. Donors have a particularly strong opportunity to push for the development of a more diverse set of microfinance tools, both by specific targeting of funds and advocacy with Afghan government counterparts.

## **5.4 Ill-health and social ceremonies**

The burdens of health spending and social ceremony investments are widely recognised as having the potential to make or keep households poor, particularly in South Asia.<sup>91</sup> The case households were no different. Both categories of spending are essential to livelihoods in different ways and cannot or ideally should not be avoided. The central challenges are reducing risks of disease, improving the quality and affordability of healthcare, and managing levels of spending on social events.

90 Holmes, Farrington and Slater, "Social Protection and Growth."

91 Krishna, *One Illness Away*; Ratna Sudarshan, "Social Protection for Home-based Women in South Asia," in *Social Protection as Development Policy*, ed. Sarah Cook and Naila Kabeer, 165-89 (London: Routledge, 2010); Altai Consulting, "Moving out of Poverty"; IFAD, *Rural Poverty Report*.

### **Risks related to ill-health**

The case evidence across declining, coping and improving households demonstrated the high incidence of health events ranging from chronic illnesses, through pregnancy and child birth complications, along with smaller non-chronic complaints. Provision of clean drinking water in a few of the study villages reduced some of these less serious illnesses, illustrating the importance of improved basic services. However, health expenditures caused considerable strain on households across wealth groups, hitting the poor the hardest. Major health crises often led to high debts and asset sales, and in a few cases families did not seek care because they could not afford it or the associated travel costs. The ill health of a male worker in particular drove a number of households into poverty or ensured that they stayed poor. Healthcare costs were sometimes higher than necessary because concerns about the quality of government-run treatment led households to use private facilities. Overall, the cost of healthcare is a major source of vulnerability to poverty that is not being adequately addressed.

The Ministry of Public Health acknowledges these burdens, as well as barriers to care-seeking related to distance and travel costs.<sup>92</sup> However its health and nutrition strategy does not include specific goals directly related to reducing healthcare costs.<sup>93</sup> Even without goals that provide accountability for progress, it has abolished fees for use of government clinics offering its Basic Package of Health Services. It has also supported a pilot of a community-based health financing scheme to test a health insurance model.<sup>94</sup> While the considerable levels of spending on healthcare identified in a ministry survey and this study seem to indicate premium-based community insurance could work,

92 Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), "Afghanistan Health Survey 2006" (Kabul: MoPH, 2006); GoA, *Ministry of Public Health, Health and Nutrition Sector Strategy* (Kabul: GoA, 2008).

93 GoA, *Health and Nutrition*.

94 Krishna D. Rao, Hugh Waters, Laura Steinhardt, Sahibullah Alam, Peter Hansen and Ahmad Jan Naeem, "An Experiment with Community Health Funds in Afghanistan," *Health Policy and Planning* 24 (2009): 301-11.

the fund had only modest results. Enrolment was low due to lack of programme awareness, perceived poor service quality and high premium levels. More experimenting is needed to identify ways to prevent ill-health events—and especially major medical crises—from increasing livelihood insecurity.<sup>95</sup>

### **Risks related to social investments**

It would be easy to label spending on events such as funerals, births or marriages as simple consumption costs. However, this would miss the events' significance as opportunities to demonstrate membership the village community, and thus invest in the social relationships which play such an important role in defining livelihood security.<sup>96</sup> The policy opening is not about eliminating these expenditures but about identifying ways to manage spending levels in a way that reduces their potential to trigger rising debt, asset sales or other negative response strategies.

For marriages this means reducing both bride prices and spending on the ceremony itself. These efforts should make marriage more affordable, reducing marriage delays, and reduce the incidence of marrying young daughters for bride price due to economic need. While the study evidence contained isolated examples of attempts to reduce marriage costs, lasting change will require a widespread consensus to counter the pressures of competition, conformity and pride that push spending higher. One potentially effective strategy is to relate community custom back to Islamic practice, which prohibits high bride prices. In one village in Ghazni Province, elders reportedly set an upper limit for bride price of 150,000 Afs, which was accepted and appreciated since it enabled more young people to marry.<sup>97</sup>

95 Rao et al, "Community Health Funds."

96 Sudarshan, "Home-based Women"; Kantor and Pain, "Securing Life and Livelihoods."

97 Mohammad Zamir, "Afghanistan's Frustrated Singles," <http://iwpr.net/report-news/afghanistans-frustrated-singles>, 29 April 2009 (accessed 15 October 2010).

**Table 6: Policy options to reduce risks from ill-health and social spending**

<i>Policy area</i>	<i>Intervention</i>	<i>Social protection orientation</i>
Ill-health	Improve accessibility of healthcare: distance, health costs, transport costs/ambulance services, gender norms	Promote; transform
	Improve healthcare quality	Promote
	Improve accessibility of basic services like drinking water and sanitation: distance, quality, costs	Promote
	Continue testing health insurance options	Prevent
	Make managing healthcare costs part of core aims of Ministry of Public Health	Prevent
Social spending	Facilitate locally-led social movements to advocate for limits to spending levels	Prevent; transform
	Public awareness campaigns to raise awareness of alternatives, role model villages	Prevent; transform
	Identify and promote models of collective funding	Prevent

The Council of Religious Scholars welcomed this and there were requests to apply it throughout the province. Another example comes from Balkh where an NGO is using public outreach campaigns to promote the idea of group marriages to reduce wedding costs, though this is more acceptable to Shias than Sunnis.<sup>98</sup> While research has identified a general openness to a change in marriage practices in many areas, the pace of change must ultimately be one that is acceptable to the local community;<sup>99</sup> for this reason efforts driven by local actors working in dialogue with communities are likely to be more successful than impositions from above that could be perceived as foreign-imposed.

Funeral ceremonies and related charity requirements are another set of important rituals. However they too can raise vulnerability to poverty, meaning that cooperative efforts to keep these costs down form another important preventative social protection approach. One

98 Zamir, "Frustrated Singles."

99 Deborah J. Smith, "Decisions, Desires and Diversity: Marriage Practices in Afghanistan" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2009).

example from the case data presents a possible way forward. In Khilar village in Badakhshan there has been a custom in place for the last seven years that when someone dies, villagers buy the required items from local shopkeepers and split the costs of paying for them. This village was also the only one with systematised charitable giving whereby all households gave a portion of grain to the NSP head who created a grain bank for use by those in need.

### ***Approaches to reducing expenditures on health and social events***

Helping households to afford and manage spending on healthcare and social events can have a major positive impact on rural development, highlighting the need for a broader approach to the issue which takes social protection into greater account. Domestic risks and responses to them can divert precious capital, credit and resources away from productive or subsistence activities.<sup>100</sup> If households had other means to cover these costs or the costs were lower, their assets could be protected. Table 6 identifies a range of options

100 Holmes, Farrington and Slater, "Social Protection and Growth."



It would be easy to label spending on events such as funerals, births or marriages as simple consumption costs. However this would miss the events' significance as opportunities to demonstrate membership the village community, and thus invest in the social relationships which play such an important role in defining livelihood security.

for reducing health and social spending. The state should lead on most of the interventions to manage healthcare costs, in partnership with NGOs active in the sector. Efforts geared to managing social expenditures need to be more locally-driven, and civil society groups are better positioned to engage in this area.

## 5.5 Education

Investment in education and skills training has the potential to be a promotive social protection mechanism, unlocking new opportunities to help people secure and improve their livelihoods. However, several contextual issues influence how far interventions can realise this potential.

### *Constraints of patronage*

Skills and education can only improve people's livelihoods if they make a meaningful difference to the choices available to them. Where patronage and connections are the most important factors in landing a job, the usefulness of education is limited.<sup>101</sup> The role of connections varied across study locations. In the deeply entrenched political and kinship networks of Kandahar, securing employment often depended on who you were and who you knew. In more remote Badakhshan, skills such as the ability to drive played a more prominent role. The near-universal relevance of patronage in Afghanistan means connections will continue to be useful, but this is increasingly balanced by a need for skills and education in many areas. The

key challenge will be ensuring school curricula and skills development programmes provide training that best fit the opportunities available, and that poor men and women can access them.

### *Constraints of quality*

Another factor influencing the promotive potential of education is quality. If the education system cannot teach basic literacy and numeracy as a bare minimum, then its ability to improve students' livelihood security is limited. A number of shortfalls were evident across the study areas: Children in fourth class were sometimes unable to read and removed from school to work, while teachers were often absent from class or (especially in the case of female teachers) unqualified. These represent the many challenges of ramping up education services after decades of conflict. School enrolment numbers are an inadequate measure of success. The sector needs to devote more resources to making sure that children leave school with the tools they need to improve their futures.

### *Constraints of gender*

Gender norms often present a major social obstacle to education's potential to improve lives. In a number of study sites girls were unable to attend school due to both lack of facilities and conservative gender norms; in the other locations they were able to participate, only to be withdrawn from school at about seventh or eighth class due to concerns about protecting family honour and reputation. These attitudes limit what these girls can be and do in the future, impacting in turn the well-being of their households and ultimately the country. The same is true for boys withdrawn early and put to work. Who knows what these children could aspire to and achieve if given the full scope to learn and dream that a quality education can provide? Interventions like food for schooling programmes did seem to encourage poor families to enrol and keep children in school, most notably in the Badakhshan villages. These programmes thus have valuable protective and promotive potential through supporting food security and providing greater access to schooling.

<sup>101</sup> Krishna, *One Illness Away*.



**Table 7: Policy options to enhance the education sector**

<i>Intervention</i>	<i>Social protection orientation</i>
Continue food for schooling programmes to enable enrolment	Protect; promote
Strengthen efforts to improve the quality of education	Promote
Promote girls' access to education: public service campaigns, local influencers, role models	Promote; transform
Broader use of role models to motivate education enrolment and youth aspirations	Promote
Address social risks via social justice-oriented curricula	Transform

### **Approaches to improving education access and outcomes**

Table 7 identifies ways to invest in education to improve its ability to both promote livelihood security and drive social change. Improving quality and curriculum content is a task for the government in partnership with key donors in the sector. Expanding and enhancing food for schooling links the government with UN agencies and other donors providing these programmes. NGOs, civil society and the state all can engage around promoting girls' access to education and improving its acceptability beyond current limits, as well as finding new ways to use role models to increase enrolment.

## **5.6 Social assistance and aid delivery**

The household case data showed that various forms of social assistance were available in the villages. Some were state-based, others from NGOs and still others community-based. However the continued tendency of many families to ration food, forego health treatment and marry daughters early to secure bride prices all illustrate the limits of these mechanisms. These more negative survival strategies were more common among families without able-bodied male labour, highlighting the particularly precarious position of these families.

### **Informal assistance**

Some of the informal mechanisms available in different study villages included receiving charity

through *zakat* and *ushr*, and participation in food distribution through *khairat* and at weddings and funerals (all specific types of Islamic charity; for definitions see glossary).<sup>102</sup> Charitable giving was highly individualised and variable in all but Khilar with its grain bank system. This lack of institutionalisation placed pressure on recipients to demonstrate their continued "worthiness," creating a cycle of dependency that sometimes blocked off potential avenues for improvement.<sup>103</sup> Already precarious, this position worsened as charitable giving declined in drought-hit areas.

### **Non-state assistance**

For many respondents, public works projects offering cash or food were the most significant forms of non-state social assistance. All study villages were home to at least one food- or cash-for-work programme. These were often administered by the NSP CDC, which was in charge of picking labourers and distributing food. In general such programmes were open to all villagers, with better-off households just as likely to take part as poorer ones. Many poorer respondent households secured several months' food supply through a combination of food-for-work, food-for-schooling or food-for-training programmes. However, the short-term and ad hoc nature of work-based

<sup>102</sup> The case studies provided considerable evidence of opportunities to obtain food through attending weddings and other events or through *khairat*. However, the numbers participating and who had access were not investigated, along with whether specific efforts were made to reach the poor or not.

<sup>103</sup> Kantor and Pain, "Securing Life and Livelihoods."

programmes seemed to limit their protective potential. Making them longer term, like the school and course-based programmes, with guaranteed work days per year for poor families could improve their role in stabilising livelihoods. However, it is also important to note that households without male labour tended to be excluded from work-based programmes, or are forced to send children in order to participate.<sup>104</sup> Some NGOs counter this problem by providing vouchers to families unable to take part for this reason.<sup>105</sup>

### *State assistance*

In most study villages, there was little evidence of state social protection interventions. Only a few respondent households had access to the state's non means-tested pension programme for families of martyrs and disabled. They managed to access this resource through the intervention of a community leader or commander. Though eligible, others without such links have been unable to benefit. This highlights challenges of delivering such benefit programmes at a local level: access often ends up being limited by opaque application processes that depend more on connections than procedure, while many potential recipients may be unaware of their eligibility in the first place.

An awareness of these issues, as well as of the importance of accountability and transparency mechanisms, will need to inform a new pilot cash transfer system. Under this plan, the state will provide unconditional cash transfers via the CDC to each village's poorest households in an attempt to smooth seasonal consumption variations.<sup>106</sup> This was developed due in part to the recognition that work-based programmes exclude many vulnerable households. To successfully reach those in need and reduce potential for elite capture, the programme will need to be accompanied by enough outreach to ensure that those who stand to benefit from

104 Holmes, Farrington and Slater, "Social Protection and Growth."

105 Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD), "Pilot Program to Support Poor Families in Afghanistan" (Kabul: MoLSAMD, 2010).

106 MoLSAMD, "Pilot Program."

it are aware of its existence and understand how it works so as to hold those administering it accountable for their inclusion and the correct distribution of the cash. The programme provides openings for appeals from those considering themselves unjustly excluded. However, the key will be making sure these hearings are carried out and that people are aware of their right to claim the benefit and feel able to speak out against local leaders who may work the system to their own benefit.

### *Aid capture by local elites*

In many instances, capture or co-opting of aid assistance by village elites—at times acting through NSP CDCs—severely impeded the ability of aid to help the most vulnerable households. This raises important questions of how aid actors engage with villages and the role of CDCs in distributing aid. Many poor respondents in the Kandahar and Sar-i-Pul study sites complained bitterly that the tendency among outside aid actors to limit their interactions to the CDC or other elders effectively shut out the views and needs of poorer residents. Others, including one member of the CDC from Lalakai village, also complained about CDC members distributing the benefits of aid along patronage networks, or simply capturing it for themselves. This might be CDC funds, food aid or access to work days. Where connections were needed to access aid, this led to environments of competition and mistrust.<sup>107</sup> These local inequalities and hierarchies support the need to question how aid is delivered, and by what means. Programming at a village level enters a complex web of social structures and power relations and can in many cases end up as a tool for strengthening existing inequalities. In particular, an assumption that community bodies must be the most impartial because they are closest to "the people" may be leading to an over-reliance on systems that are in reality little more than proxies for the rich and powerful.<sup>108</sup> All of this can affect programme

107 See Kantor and Pain, "Securing Life and Livelihoods" for more detailed analysis of the role of social relationships and inequalities in Afghan village life.

108 For more detailed analysis of the implications for programming

**Table 8: Policy options to enhance social assistance and aid delivery**

<i>Policy area</i>	<i>Intervention</i>	<i>Social protection orientation</i>
Social assistance	Regularise and expand work days available through food-for-work; improve means testing	Protect
	Ensure all forms of social assistance reach households lacking able bodied male labour	Protect
	Institutionalise traditional forms of giving to make receipt less individualised; orient forms of charity to development; reduce long term dependence when possible	Protect; promote; transform
	Ensure NGO or state social assistance has well-advertised, transparent inclusion criteria and is easy to understand to reduce dependence on others for access	Protect; transform
Aid delivery	Invest the required time to work with the poor or marginalised to create conditions for social change; make interventions socially transformative in delivery mechanisms	Transform
	Develop ways to engage elites to reduce programme co-option; deconcentrate power	Transform

delivery and outcomes and needs to be planned for as much as possible to dilute opportunities for misuse.

### ***Approaches to improve social assistance and the transparency of aid delivery***

As the policy options in Table 8 show, social assistance programmes must adapt to incorporate pre-existing support systems, better target those most in need, and counter local hierarchies which can skew aid distribution along power and patronage lines. All are complex requirements which depend on improving understanding of local contexts, a shift that will need allocations of both time and money. The state and NGOs also need to ensure programme criteria and procedures are as simple and transparent as possible and that information is made readily available through a range of media. Investments in new social assistance programmes like the pilot described

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of village context see Pain and Kantor, “Understanding and Addressing Context.”

above are important steps forward, but they must be financially sustainable and accountable and transparent so recipients can depend on them.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

This section identified openings where social protection policy, independently or incorporated into wider development efforts, could improve rural livelihood security. Areas for intervention cover a wide range of issues and sectors, mirroring the complexity of factors influencing livelihood security for rural Afghans. Prioritising among the sectors and policy options is difficult as many intersect and support each other in their effects, or meet the needs of different groups. In all cases, the challenge to fostering sustainable improvements in livelihood security lies in designing interventions that meet immediate needs for protection, prevention and promotion, while fostering social change driven by communities themselves. To achieve this, the reduction of both economic and social risk must form the keystone of future programming and policymaking.

## 6. Conclusion

Despite tangible improvements in many basic services, a culmination of increasing pressures and narrowing options is undermining the ability of many rural families to make a basic living. Across wealth groups, the majority of households in this study experienced declining livelihood security due to the complex interaction of shared risks related to weather, politics and the global economy with individual risks such as ill-health, household composition and life cycle position. For many, factors of location, gender norms, social expectations, and the terms of access to employment limited the range or quality of responses available. In contrast to this, the few households with connections to powerful political actors were able to use these to enhance their wealth and social positions.

The paper identified a wide range of openings for policy and different measures within these. In doing so, it applied the concept of transformative social protection to highlight ways to protect people's basic needs, prevent deprivation, promote improvement and transform the social structures and expectations that bar their path out of poverty. In this way the recommendations aim to tackle the complex of economic and social causes of poverty as well as treating its symptoms. They also aim to reduce households' exposure to risk, something current ARD policy approaches do not always seem to prioritise. Instead, these are driven by market-led growth models which overlook the rational aversion to risk that many poor households may feel. A major challenge in moving a poverty reduction and social protection agenda forward in Afghanistan is thus overcoming the privileged position of the market in policy discourse to carve out an equal space for interventions that mitigate risks and stabilise livelihoods.

The aid community—from donors to government and non-government actors—has so far made little progress in its willingness and ability to articulate

and act on the risks facing rural Afghans.<sup>109</sup> Part of this shortcoming emanates from the difficulty of targeting the underlying causes of inequality without an understanding of the social dynamics that drive them.<sup>110</sup> There is currently little acknowledgment on the part of either the government or the international community that social context matters, a fact reflected in the limited resources devoted to social analysis in existing policy or programming.<sup>111</sup> This means that the attention given to poverty reduction tends to focus on technically-oriented efforts to deliver access without reflection on how local social environments may limit or distort them. This technical approach risks delivering development programmes that reinforce existing inequalities and feed into grievances related to the distribution of aid.

The scale and scope of policy options identified in Section 5 presents a significant challenge. It is clear that no one agency can address all of these issues, and that many actions depend on others happening in sequence. For example, motivating school enrolment through role models and enhancing aspirations must come hand in hand with better education and an economic environment that allows new skills to be put to use. This complexity highlights an urgent need for a coordinated effort to sequence actions across sectors at both a macro and micro level. Achieving this, however, will take improved analysis and planning capacity, strong leadership to guide coordination within and across sectors, strategic and financial commitment to reprioritising poverty reduction, and openness to acknowledging and addressing the social drivers of poverty. None of these exist at present largely due to the political pressures many actors face.

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109 See Christoplos, "Out of Step?" which noted the lack of attention among aid actors to rural risks and the lack of understanding of the sources of vulnerability rural Afghans faced as early as 2004.

110 Christoplos, "Out of Step?"

111 Kantor and Pain, "Poverty in Afghan Policy."

These pressures tend to drive the policy agenda away from the needs of ordinary Afghans and toward externally designed policy models, shoring up local powerholders and cyclical short-term commitments. The effects of politics on Afghan development policy will not dissipate in the near term and may even become stronger. What is

needed now is an increase in advocacy. Supported by evidence of the kind presented here, advocacy efforts must identify and push for the types of interventions most likely to make sustainable improvements to Afghan lives and drive home to policymakers that success in Afghanistan will not come without reducing poverty.

## Appendix 1: Improving Household Case Details

Household	Demographic	Land (jeribs - irrigated/ rainfed)/ Livestock	Other income	Health	Debt	Ceremonies	Factors driving change		
							1	2	3
Muneer (Lalakai-10)	28 members; 5 working sons; 6 boys studying; conflict over education	150j and 15j garden	Brick kiln; livestock market; slaughter house; salary	1 illness; spent 74,000 Afs	Low to none	100,000 Afs for son's marriage and bride price (BP)	Land	Diversification; sons' labour	Connections
Yaqoob (Julan-40)	21 members; 6 sons working; 2 boys study	50j and garden; bought (or confiscated) land	Dubai car exports; salary; mechanic	2 people diabetic; 2 sons drug addicted	High, can repay quickly	450,000 Afs spent for marriage and BP	Land	Diversification; sons' labour	Shura head; connections
Lalakai-05	18 members; 2 sons work; boys studying	None	Contracting business; own wood yard, truck and tractor	1 illness; spent 60,000 Afs on treatment	None	3 marriages; spent 200-300,000 Afs for weddings; against BP; sold unproductive land		Male labour	Connections
Jamil (Julan-42)	16 members; 4 sons work; some boys at madrasa	18j land; sharecrop; 4j garden	3 sons in salary work (Karzai links)	None	None	1 marriage; 200,000Afs spent from savings	Land	Male labour	Connections
Julan-57	15 members; 2 sons work; 3 boys study	5j vineyard; Sold 3 j	Custom house; cook for weddings; mechanic; literacy course	1 illness; spent 45,000 Afs	70,000 Afs for marriage, health and house extension	2 marriages, 300,000 Afs; no BP; sold land and borrowed		Diversification	Connections



Yakin (Julan-56)	4 members; 0 sons working or studying (too young)	Sharecrop; livestock trading	Zaranj fares; history of labour work; embroidery	None	Funds; investment	150,000 Afs for own marriage; savings and credit	Ambition	Household Size	Credit network
Najeeb (Shur Qul-24)	11 members; 2 sons working; 6 children study	1j ir., 5j RF; 110 trees; 1 cow	Lapis mine labour; driver with NGO; Iran, then ANSF	18,000 Afs for injured son; paid from salary	85,000 Afs; majority left from marriage; repay in 3 months. 10,000 Afs for Iran migration	250,000 Afs spent for wedding of eldest son. All borrowed	Salaried job	Male labour of age	
Farid (Shur Qul-34)	18 members; 2 in Pakistan; 4 sons working; children study	3j ir., 8j RF; 70 trees; Livestock; sharecrop	School teacher; NGO guard; NGO enterprise training	None	Avoid debt	Sons responsible for marriage costs; 2 married sons	Land	Salaried work, male labour	Avoid health events, debt
Shafiq (Lalakai-03)	9 members; 0 sons working; 2 boys study	Own house/ land; 1 cow, diversifying into livestock	Used shoe sales; embroidery	Head disabled	100,000 Afs for land/ house and rickshaw; repay but borrow to do so	Educate boys before marriage	Urban economy		Credit network
Hamid (Lalakai 19)	12 members; male head died 10- 15 years ago. 5 sons working; children at madrasa	No land; 1 cow	Vending cloth and plasters; brickmaking; selling trouser string	1 illness; treated in Pakistan, 15,000 Afs; savings	About 100,000 Afs for working capital and marriage	290,000 Afs marriage and BP; salaries, credit	Urban economy	Male labour	

Abdul Haq (Toghloq-70)	19 members; 5 sons work; no-one of school age	5j ir, 4j RF; bought 3j RF land; 4 cows and 30 goats/ sheep; slowly growing herd size; sharecrop	Flour mill	None	None	High bride price(400,000 Afs) in opium times	Land	United joint family; male labour	Livestock
Khalid (Lalakai-16)	14 members; head died; 3 sons work; no boys of school age	Own land for house; sharecrop	Brickmaking; truck loading; vending perfume; embroidery	Illness and death of male head, 40,000 Afs	50,000 Afs (35,000 health related)	250,000 Afs BP owed		Male labour	Uncle's help; credit
Julan-48	15 members; 3 sons work; 2 boys study	20j; 5j garden; invested 200,000 Afs in pomegranate	Own truck/ transport; shared truck driving; Guard in Kabul (Karzai links)	1 illness, treated in Kabul, 7000 Afs; used savings	None	2 marriages; 300,000 Afs; paid by saving, truck sale and credit	Land	Male labour	Salary



## Appendix 2: Coping Household Case Details

Household	Demographics	Land (Ieribs - irrigated/ rained)/ Livestock	Other income	Health	Debt	Ceremonies	Factors influencing classification		
							1	2	3
Haji Wadi (Shur Qul-38)	13 members; 0 sons working; 7 children study (1 in medical school)	15j ir., 5j RF; 20 apple trees; 3 cows; sharecrop	Literacy course instructor; NGO salary	2 illnesses; borrowed, sold wood, land	73,000 Afs; negotiating land sale to repay	Accepted small bride price for daughter's marriage	Drought	Few earners, but head has salary	Lack of market access
Fahim (Toghloq-77)	8 members; 1 son works; 1 son in Kabul with relative and studies; 4 children study	2j ir; 1 cow; sold RF land	School caretaker salary; son in ANSF	Miscarriage 24000 Afs spent on transport and care	40,000 Afs	250,000 Afs for marriage; sold livestock and borrowed	Land and livestock sales but shifting to nonfarm livelihood	Few earners, but workers in salaried jobs	Health and ceremony spending
Khilar-56	11 members; 2 sons work; male head died; 2 study	4j ir, 3j RF; cow and goats/ sheep; reduced herd size; bought land rights of relative	School teacher	3 illnesses/ deaths; 23,500 Afs	52,000 Afs; funerals, land buy out, food; sell livestock to repay	3 deaths; 80,000 Afs on funerals; 8,500 charity	Drought	Few earners but one salary	Ill-health, funerals
Lalakai-01	16 members; 5 sons work; none study	sharecrop; live in landlord's house	Drivers; market watchman; vending; trading; many failed investments	Limited treatment of elderly mother in law	400,000 Afs linked to investment losses, vehicle purchase etc.; credit harder to get	Exchange marriage; cannot afford BP	Investment losses and debt	Male labour, but poor quality, low paid work	Dependence on landlord

Lalakai-12	9 members; female head; 3 sons work; none study	sharecrop; live in landlord's house	Women work in landlord's home; contract brickmaking; load carrying	Many with asthma; spend 100 Afs/week per person	40,000 Afs for marriage	Exchange marriage		Male labour	Dependence on landlord
Julan-50	19 members; head died; 5 sons work; 2 boys study	Land for house; 2 migrate to milk poppy; cow and few sheep; trade in goats tried; lack funds for feed	Daily labour; well drilling; bakery; lack capital to invest in workshop	100,000 Afs on head's treatment; sale of goats, sons' earnings used to pay	175,000 Afs; majority for land for house	60,000 Afs on funeral	Debt	Male labour	Ill-health and death

## Appendix 3: Village Key

In the individual case studies that formed the basis paper, all study villages were referred to by alphabetical codes to ensure anonymity. These have now been changed to fictitious names for ease of reader reference.

*Table A1: Fictitious names and original codes for study villages*

<i>Province/District</i>	<i>Village name (fictitious)</i>	<i>Original code</i>
<i>Kandahar</i>		
Dand	Lalakai	KA
Dand	Julan	KB
<i>Badakhshan</i>		
Yamgan	Shur Qul	BA
Jurm	Toghloq	BB
Jurm	Khilar	BC
<i>Sar-i-Pul</i>		
Sayyad	Kushlak	SA
Sayyad	Pishin	SB
Sayyad	Sarband	SC
<i>Faryab</i>		
Dawlatabad	Chakar	FA
Dawlatabad	Hisaar	FB
Dawlatabad	Efroz	FC



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### Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

Flower Street (corner of Street 2)  
Shahr-i-Naw, Kabul, Afghanistan

phone: +93 (0)79 608 548

email: [areu@areu.org.af](mailto:areu@areu.org.af)

website: [www.areu.org.af](http://www.areu.org.af)



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