



A Little Bit Poppy-free and a Little Bit Eradicated: *Opium poppy cultivation in Balkh and Badakhshan Provinces in 2011-2012*

Paul Fishstein



European Commission



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Paul Fishstein
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Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
Afs	Afghanis, the Afghan unit of currency. During the time of research, 50 Afs was roughly equivalent to US\$1
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
CDC	Community Development Councils
CSO	Central Statistics Organization
DDA	District Development Assembly
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
FEWS NET	Famine Early Warning Systems Network
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
Ha	Hectares
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IMF	International Military Forces
ISA	Islamic State of Afghanistan
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MCN	Ministry of Counter Narcotics
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Reconstruction and Development
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNODC	United Nations Offices on Drugs and Crime
USIP	United States Institute of Peace
WFP	(United Nations) World Food Programme

Glossary

<i>arbaki</i>	Originally tribal security forces indigenous to the Loya Paktia region, but now refers to almost any irregular local security forces.
<i>bandar</i>	Literally meaning border or port, but also refers to a road entry or exit point to or from a city.
<i>chai khana</i>	Tea house, often used as a social meeting place
<i>chars</i>	Hashish or the plant from which it comes (<i>cannabis sativus</i>)
<i>gadwadi</i>	Confusion, often conveying political disorder
<i>gelam</i>	Woven carpet (non-pile)
<i>ghamu</i>	Vetch, a fodder crop. Known elsewhere in Afghanistan as <i>shokhal</i>
<i>jalob</i>	Trader, dealer, middleman. Often used pejoratively.
<i>jerib</i>	Measure of land area equal to 0.494 acre or roughly one-fifth of a hectare
<i>jihad</i>	Righteous struggle or holy war, usually referring to the 1979-92 war against the Soviet occupation.
<i>jihadi</i>	Commander or political leader who gained his strength during the jihad years (1979-92)
<i>jui</i>	Canal or ditch

<i>kar khana</i>	Factory or workshop
<i>khaki</i>	Loamy soil
<i>kotara</i>	System for piecework, used for digging ditches or building walls (from Uzbeki)
<i>kuchis</i>	Nomads
<i>kunjara</i>	Oil seed cake — from cotton seed, flax (linseed), sesame, sunflower seed, mustard. Used as animal feed.
<i>lakh</i>	One lakh is equivalent to 100,000 Afs.
<i>lalmi</i>	Rain-fed (i.e., land, crops). Also referred to as <i>daima</i> in parts of north.
<i>madrassa</i>	Religious school or training academy
<i>malek</i>	Local leader, village head
<i>mawqawmat</i>	Resistance period against the Taliban
<i>mehman khana</i>	Guest house, informal hotel
<i>mujahidin</i>	Guerrillas who fought in the 1979-92 war against the Soviet occupation (literally, those who fight <i>jihad</i>)
<i>mullah</i>	Religious leader
<i>nakhod</i>	Chickpea
<i>nawroz</i>	Afghan new year, occurring in March
<i>nemayesh</i>	A show, play, or appearance (often used disparagingly)
<i>nim kala</i>	Half-assed (literally, half-headed)
<i>patak</i>	Grass pea (fed to animals or eaten by humans in times of desperation). Also known as <i>kulul</i> .
<i>pow</i>	Measure of weight equal to 435 grams, or nearly one pound
<i>qarz-e hasana</i>	Loan given without interest. Literally “beautiful loan” or “goodly loan” given without any expectation of reward or profit.
<i>regi</i>	Sandy (soil)
<i>rish-e safidan</i>	Council of elders (literally “white beards”)
<i>rishqa</i>	Alfalfa (fed to animals)
<i>Rowza-e Sharif</i>	Shrine of Ali in Mazar-e Sharif, erroneously referred to as the “Blue Mosque”
<i>sarparast</i>	Supervisor or guardian, often referring to male family member
<i>member</i>	at home to represent and defend interests of the family
<i>ser</i>	Measure of weight, most commonly Kabul <i>ser</i> , equal to 7 kg (15.4 lbs) and Mazar <i>ser</i> , equal to 14 kg
<i>shaftal</i>	Clover (fed to animals)
<i>shenakht</i>	Friendship or acquaintance, but often used to describe personal relationships with officials from which favour or advantage is gained
<i>showqi</i>	An act pursued for pleasure or out of enthusiasm
<i>shura</i>	Council
<i>sudh</i>	Usury, excessive interest rates
<i>talib</i>	Islamic student (singular of taliban)
<i>teka</i>	Piece, as in piece-work
<i>tekadar</i>	Contractor, as in one who does a piece of work for payment
<i>washi</i>	Wild or uncivilized
<i>woleswal</i>	District administrator or governor, as in one who administers a <i>woleswali</i>
<i>woleswali</i>	Administrative division within a province
<i>wolesi jirga</i>	Lower house of Afghan parliament

Executive Summary

While Balkh and Badakhshan have very different geographical, social, political, and historical contexts, it is hard to identify any factors which could significantly reduce cultivation of opium poppy in either province in the foreseeable future. In Balkh, some of the coercive approaches which have reduced opium poppy cultivation are not sustainable in the longer-term, especially where they go against the economic conditions prevailing in the rural economy. In Badakhshan, a half-hearted coercion has produced uneven results. In the context of the 2014 security transition, it is an open question as to whether the Afghan government and its international partners, preoccupied with other issues (e.g., security, presidential elections), will have the motivation and the means to maintain unpopular coercive approaches, especially where they require the application of consistent pressure on local officials and communities which may have different agendas.

Household-level field research done during May 2012 in farming communities in two districts in Balkh (Chimtal, Char Bolak) and Badakhshan (Jurm, Khash) which had a history of opium poppy cultivation, revealed very different dynamics within the opium economy. In Balkh, analysis confirmed the role of state presence and coercion in suppressing opium poppy cultivation as well as the correlation of cultivation with insecurity, with poppy concentrated in areas inaccessible to the government. Balkh has retained its “poppy-free” status, first obtained in 2007, while also raising questions about metrics, as little independent or verifiable information is available on the insecure areas in which poppy is grown. It is also possible that in Balkh causality runs in both directions, and that at least some of the insecurity in areas in which opium poppy is found is the result of stresses and grievances connected with the suppression of cultivation. Deployment of local police (who have informally come to be called *arbaki*) was credited with improving security and helping to maintain the suppression of cultivation; the population is not confident that this security effect will endure, however, and they have raised concerns about the role that the “*arbaki*” may play, including allegations of involvement in poppy cultivation.

In Badakhshan, analysis connected the decision of households to cultivate poppy with their efforts to resolve financial stress (including debt and asset sales) brought on by the long and harsh winter of 2011-12, and, based on the previous year’s experience, the lack of a credible threat of eradication. Among surveyed households, the number who reported growing poppy doubled from the previous year and the area devoted to poppy increased from four to ten percent of total area sown. Unlike in Balkh, where there has been one dominant leader who has been both motivated and capable of suppressing cultivation in most areas of the province, in Badakhshan power has been more contested and fragmented among local commanders and power holders, who have shown little interest in reducing cultivation, trafficking, and other illicit activities. During 2012, Badakhshan was estimated to have had a 13 percent increase in cultivated area, which moved the province into being a “moderate” rather than “low” producer of opium poppy. Also, unlike Balkh where cultivation is largely limited to two districts, cultivation is widely dispersed across the province’s 26 districts. Given Badakhshan’s mountainous geography and highly contested space, the reporting (post-fieldwork) of apparently much more extensive eradication raises the question of whether the authorities are attempting to impose their will in a more aggressive way than previously and, if so, what the reaction of communities and local power holders will be.

While farming conditions in the spring of 2012 were much more promising than the previous year, analysis confirmed the importance of off-farm income in household livelihoods. Labour opportunities and wages in Balkh, especially Mazar-e Sharif (the provincial centre of Balkh), were much more plentiful than during the previous drought year. Meanwhile, in Badakhshan labourers were struggling to find work due to the delay in the start of the construction season. In both provinces, farming households, labourers, and shopkeepers spoke longingly of the “good old days” when the economy was thriving due to opium production and trade. While Badakhshan continues to be considered a drug transit route, this activity does not generate the same widespread incomes as did the extensive cultivation of the mid-2000s. The vast majority of surveyed households in Badakhshan were calculated to be existing on US\$2 per person per day, with only about one-quarter meeting their grain requirements from their own production.

With the political and security situation now on an unknown trajectory, reductions in cultivation may be more difficult to achieve or maintain, especially in an unstable or contested environment. The enormous pressure on power holders and aspirants, already understood to be preparing for post-2014 instability, to conclude local deals in order to control an area or resources will reduce incentives to adhere to national policies where such policies run up against local interests. In Balkh, which has served as a successful model not just of elimination of opium poppy but also economic development under a strong provincial administration, the shifting of emphasis from Kabul and from the international community may reduce the sorts of political incentives that have until now made it worth imposing unpopular policies. The anticipated contraction in the national economy due to the withdrawal of international spending and reduction in local investor confidence may reduce both household livelihoods opportunities and sources of patronage for power holders. Finally, given the dependence of so many households on off-farm income, pressure to relax the suppression of cultivation may rise in proportion to the anticipated contraction of the economy and the reduction in opportunities for work-related migration in the region.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Purpose and rationale

Estimates are that the area cultivated to opium poppy in Afghanistan increased by 18 percent between 2010-11 and 2011-12. This occurred alongside a 154 percent increase in the land eradicated by the Afghan government with policy support and financial incentives from international partners. Due to poor weather conditions and crop disease in some of the most significant opium producing regions, however, average yields were down by 47 percent from 2010-11, which led to a drop in total production of 36 percent. Coupled with a nine percent fall in the farm gate price of fresh opium, the estimated total value of production for the economy fell by nearly one-half (49 percent) and gross income per hectare fell by more than one-half (57 percent).

Despite the policy emphasis and financial support given since 2001, the agriculture and rural development sector has not become the producer of livelihoods or the driver of economic prosperity that is described in numerous policy documents and frameworks, and which would indeed help the transition to licit livelihoods. The reasons for this have been explored in various analyses, including those conducted by AREU.¹ At the same time, as has been documented extensively in AREU research and analysis, counter-narcotics policy and practice has focused obsessively on short-term metrics of progress such as annual decreases in cultivated area and the number of “poppy-free” provinces.

While in theory counter-narcotics is placed in a broader development context, analysis is often based on insufficient household-level information to explain why households move in or out of opium poppy cultivation, and on inadequate information about the institutions which affect the decision-making environment. Also, in areas in which opium poppy cultivation has been suppressed through coercive measures, information is usually lacking on the effect of that suppression and how households have responded to it to maintain their livelihoods. Adverse effects are many and include:

- economic shocks, often involving rising levels of indebtedness to rural households who either grow poppy or derive income from labour on the fields of someone who does;
- broader contraction in the local and regional economy due to reductions in income spent on goods and services;
- increased consolidation of economic and political power by those with the means to influence the location of eradication and to control illicit markets; and
- alienation of the population from the government with consequent rise in insecurity.

Previous work and analysis

The current study follows extensive research previously done by AREU exploring the dynamics of opium poppy cultivation and other aspects of the rural economy in various provinces of

¹ David Mansfield, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Counter-narcotics efforts and their effects in Nangarhar and Helmand in the 2010-11 growing season” (Kabul: AREU, 2011); Adam Pain, “Opium Poppy Strikes Back: The 2011 Return of Opium in Balkh and Badakhshan Provinces” (Kabul: AREU, 2011); David Mansfield, “Where Have all the Flowers Gone? Assessing the Sustainability of Current Reductions in Opium Production in Afghanistan” (Kabul: AREU, 2010); David Mansfield, “‘Poppy Free’ Provinces: A Measure or a Target?” (Kabul: AREU, 2009); David Mansfield and Adam Pain, “Counter-Narcotics in Afghanistan: The Failure of Success?” (Kabul: AREU, 2008); Adam Pain, “‘Let Them Eat Promises’: Closing the Opium Poppy Fields in Balkh and its Consequences” (Kabul: AREU, 2008); David Mansfield, “Evidence from the Field: Understanding Changing Levels of Opium Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan” (Kabul: AREU, 2007); Adam Pain, “The Spread of Opium Cultivation in Balkh” (Kabul: AREU, 2007).

Afghanistan, including Balkh and Badakhshan. Past research² has highlighted various factors which determine the level and distribution of cultivation, including: the role of agro-ecological factors, the availability of water and its allocation geographically and socio-economically, histories of settlements and ethnic identities, the interplay of formal and informal institutions, political factors including the role of important actors, households' pursuit of livelihoods security, market access, terms of trade, security, and governance in determining the level and distribution of cultivation.

Key recurrent findings suggest:

1. Coercion to abandon poppy when viable sources of livelihoods are not in place can be counterproductive to both population welfare and government goals for stability.
2. Simple crop substitution is inadequate due to the positive characteristics of opium poppy relative to other crops.
3. Good governance and security, which facilitate the proper functioning of input and output markets, are critical to ensuring the long-term transition to licit production.

Research outputs have also stressed the inadequacy of short-term (annual) shifts in area cultivated in measuring long-term, sustainable movement out of poppy, in particular how such measures and the related goal of "poppy-free" provinces confuse means with ends.

Previous research in Balkh pointed to "severe, negative welfare outcomes for particular social groups" and the likely lack of durability of the reductions achieved in 2007.³ The 2010-11 analysis placed the increase in cultivation in both provinces "in the context of a failing rural economy" and a worsening security situation, along with unfulfilled promises for development support and the sense that the "southern provinces are being rewarded with greater levels of development funding despite their failure to give up the crop."⁴

The current AREU research funded by the European Commission has the following aims: 1) to provide an assessment of how well support to the wider political and economic environment underlies and facilitates expanded livelihood options for rural Afghans; 2) to provide an assessment of how changes to the wider enabling environment influences decision to cultivate opium poppy or not; and, 3) to identify policy recommendations about how efforts to create supportive environments sustaining opium poppy reduction can be improved. This case study attempts to further these aims.⁵

The current research has focused on individual household decision-making and the factors that are likely to contribute to decisions on whether or not to grow poppy. As with previous research, the overall approach is to place opium poppy cultivation in a broader livelihoods, governance, and political context.

2 Among the publications noted in Footnote 1, see the following for more on the two provinces: Pain, "Let Them Eat Promises"; Pain, "Opium Poppy Strikes Back"; Pain, "The Spread of Opium Cultivation."

3 Pain, "The Spread of Opium Cultivation."

4 Pain, "Opium Poppy Strikes Back."

5 A more condensed, policy-oriented analysis, "Eyes Wide Shut: Counter-narcotics in Transition" will appear as an AREU Briefing Paper in June 2013.

2. Methodology

2.1 Description of methodology

The research draws on a number of different sources, including quantitative and qualitative household-level data collected by survey teams in two districts in each province. Quantitative information included land owned, land farmed, land sharecropped or leased, area planted to each crop, numbers and types of livestock, household composition, off-farm income, and debt incurred. Qualitative household information included type of irrigation, difficulties in obtaining access to land, perceptions of agricultural conditions, constraints on marketing of agricultural outputs (including opium), livelihoods-related migration, sales of household assets, donor or government assistance, types of off-farm employment, and respondents views on changes in and sustainability of their economic situation. Information was collected on a number of variables for both the 2011-12 and 2010-11 agricultural years. In addition, in each of the four districts, interviews were held with shopkeepers and labourers, and in each province interviews were held with government officials, aid officials, United Nations (UN) officials, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Geospatial mapping conducted by Alcis Ltd. showed the history of poppy cultivation within the provinces and were used to identify fieldwork areas within the selected districts which had a history of cultivation and which therefore had the potential to again cultivate. The maps also helped to provide a historical context. Finally, the research drew on a wide variety of secondary sources, including previous AREU published work on the rural economy in Balkh and Badakhshan, and donor, NGO, and government reports and statistical compilations.

Fieldwork was carried out between 8-28 May 2012. In both provinces, an attempt was made to conduct fieldwork at or near the opium harvest time, as respondents' recollections would be more current, although this was complicated due to logistical considerations and the harsh and lingering winter in Badakhshan which delayed the harvest. The fieldwork was done roughly 10 days before the start of the wheat harvest, which would take about one month. The opium harvest would be roughly coincident, although it had already started in some places in Balkh.

As is usually the case, security limited the mobility of both the international researcher and the Afghan survey team. As described below, while attempts were made to conduct fieldwork in significant poppy-growing areas, insecurity limited the ability to visit some of those areas. In Balkh, areas for fieldwork in the poppy growing districts of Char Bolak and Chimtal were identified in advance based on geospatial estimates of production, but upon arrival the Afghan survey team determined that the main areas for cultivation were too insecure for the team to visit. Therefore, fieldwork was carried out in areas adjacent to areas of poppy cultivation which had in past years also had cultivation. In Badakhshan, cultivation has historically been more dispersed, with the main concentration shifting among the districts almost annually. Therefore, fieldwork was conducted in the districts of Jurm and Khash, because these districts had been covered by previous AREU research and because both had previously been significant poppy-growing areas, and therefore had the potential to return to high levels of cultivation.⁶

Finally, the methodology employed in Balkh and Badakhshan is similar to that which has been used in recent years in other provinces such as Helmand and Nangarhar, and will therefore allow for more comparative analysis.⁷

2.2 Caveats

Any research in Afghanistan requires certain caveats, especially so for research that touches on sensitive topics such as opium poppy cultivation, armed opposition groups, and government

⁶ Unlike in Balkh, in Badakhshan the main areas of poppy cultivation have varied over the years. From 2001-07, the area belonging to current Jurm and Khash districts averaged nearly one-third of cultivation in Badakhshan.

⁷ See David Mansfield, "All Bets are Off! The prospect for imposing controls on opium production in the run up to transition" (Kabul: AREU, 2013); Also, Mansfield, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place."

corruption. As noted above, due to security concerns it was not possible to conduct fieldwork in the poppy growing areas of Balkh, although the areas selected were directly adjacent to the growing areas and had previously been cultivated areas. The survey team was also able to talk with residents of the poppy growing areas outside of those areas. Additionally, all areas of Afghanistan are idiosyncratic and therefore findings from the fieldwork areas cannot be used to draw inferences about the larger population of households or villages in either the two provinces or Afghanistan more generally. Rather, the research focused on understanding household livelihood trajectories, assets, and opportunities to illuminate the factors which affect household decisions.

To minimise suspicion among respondents, interviews were held informally in farmers' fields, with the notes written up subsequent to the interview. This had the advantage of helping respondents focus on their agricultural activities (especially since the fieldwork was conducted close to the major harvest time for wheat, opium, and other significant crops) and to minimise the various sources of bias that would have been caused by a formal interview. This approach had the disadvantage, however, of relying on the recall of both respondents and fieldworkers, which are notoriously imperfect, especially when it comes to the quality of life in the past (i.e., prices were lower, everyone was happy). Ultimately, the chosen approach is considered to have more advantages, and where possible all estimates were triangulated by talking with other respondents.

While the fieldworkers did not ask directly about illicit activities such as growing and trafficking in illicit substances, any discussion of sensitive topics such as the illicit economy, corruption of government officials, and the insurgency could affect people's willingness to be open and truthful. While the fieldworkers were familiar with the areas, they still represented outside elements, and were undoubtedly regarded with some curiosity or mistrust. This is especially the case when interviews are held in a semi-public space such as agricultural lands.

Where analysis relies on stated perceptions or opinions, caution should obviously be exercised, as they may embody a bias. For instance, questions about whether the government or development agencies had provided assistance may elicit responses in the hope of attracting future assistance. Aside from any specific agenda, it is human nature to complain, and it is possible that given the opportunity to do so, respondents may understate the quality and quantity of assistance they have received.

Farm incomes were calculated based on information, including yields, reported by households. Where households did not report yields, averages for other similar households were used. As fieldwork was done before the completion of the 2012 harvest, yields from 2011 were used. The 2011 figures may understate actual conditions because rains and general conditions were better in the 2011-12 cropping season. Separate yields were used for irrigated and rain-fed wheat, but not for other crops, as the differences in calculation would have been negligible. Allowances were also made for sharecropping; i.e., subtracting output which would have been taken by the owner of land. No attempt was made to net out costs of agricultural inputs, which may overstate income somewhat. Finally, most output prices were gathered during fieldwork; others were taken from secondary sources.

A number of specific questions required a nuanced interpretation. For instance, given the fluidity of work and livelihoods in rural Afghanistan, in some cases what respondents meant by "part-time" and "full-time" was not clear, and so it is possible that part-time work was not adequately captured. In some cases, it was not clear whether full-time off-farm workers who were in Kabul or Iran were included in the numbers of persons reported as in the household. The questions that tried to elicit respondents' views on the sustainability of livelihood changes were somewhat problematic, as the responses seemed to largely reflect personality differences (i.e. optimists vs. pessimists).

While the above caveats should be kept in mind, the methodology was designed to minimise the potential problems identified above, and was utilised by experienced researchers who have been doing similar fieldwork in Afghanistan for more than 15 years. Additionally, the use of a methodology similar to that being used in Helmand and Nangarhar – also sites of the European Commission funded research – should allow some comparisons of conditions in the four provinces.

3. Opium poppy cultivation in 2011-12

3.1 National outlook, with regional/provincial trends

According to the “Afghanistan Opium Survey 2012”⁸ of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the area cultivated to opium in Afghanistan increased by 18 percent over 2011, despite a 154 percent increase in the land eradicated by the Afghan government with policy support and financial incentives from international partners (see Annex 1). Total production, however, is estimated to have dropped by over one-third (36 percent) due to a 47 percent reduction in average yields brought about by poor weather conditions and crop disease in some of the most significant opium producing regions. Reductions in average yield along with a nine percent fall in the farm gate price of fresh opium reduced the total national value of production by nearly one-half (49 percent) and gross income per hectare by more than one-half (57 percent). These figures refer to national totals and averages, which hide significant regional and local variation in conditions and farmer responses. UNODC refers to the “regional divide” in cultivation, with nearly all (95 percent) production coming from nine provinces, including some of the most insecure ones (i.e., Helmand alone produced 49 percent of national output).

UNODC also projected no change in the total number of “poppy-free” provinces (17), although Ghor dropped from the list of the “poppy-free” and Faryab was added. The UNODC 2012 Opium Survey predicts no change in the status of eight provinces in the north and the northeast regions which are “poppy-free,” including Balkh, and increases of ten percent and 13 percent in the remaining two provinces, Baghlan and Badakhshan. The 13 percent increase in Badakhshan came despite reported eradication of 48 percent of the crop,⁹ and is on top of the 2010-11 increase of 55 percent in cultivation. The absolute area, however, remains small relative to the major producing provinces; i.e., less than three percent as compared with Helmand and one percent of total national production. The two most significant provinces, Helmand and Kandahar, were reported to have increased by 19 percent and decreased by 11 percent, respectively. With a sharp increase in cultivated area of 58 percent, Farah is reported to have become the province with the second largest area devoted to poppy, after Helmand.

Prices for opium climbed during 2010 and 2011, peaked in early 2011, then held stable throughout the planting season before beginning to decline. While opium prices remained high, they were reported to have decreased somewhat across regions and levels. The UNODC 2012 Survey cites continued high prices as the most important reason farmers grew opium (44 percent of growers cited favourable prices). UNODC reported that prices had become more differentiated among regions, which would suggest less market integration. The decrease in price from 2011 was somewhat less pronounced in the northeast (i.e., Badakhshan) than in four of the five other regions. Through all of this period, including the fall 2011 opium poppy planting period, prices in the north and northeast were below those of other regions. At the same time, the retail price of wheat (grain and flour) in urban markets while still somewhat higher than in 2010 had been decreasing for the most part since July 2011. This had turned the terms of trade in favour of opium poppy. The decrease in wheat price has been attributed to the resumption of higher levels of export from key regional producers such as Kazakhstan and Pakistan.¹⁰

8 United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime/Ministry of Counter Narcotics (UNODC/MCN), “Afghanistan Opium Survey 2012: Summary Findings,” Final Report (Kabul: UNODC/MCN, 2012).

9 Ministry of Counter Narcotics/United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (MCN/UNODC), “Afghanistan Poppy Eradication Verification, Final Report” (Kabul: MCN/UNODC, 2012).

10 World Food Programme/Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (WFP/VAM), “Afghanistan Market Price Bulletin, June 2012” (Kabul: WFP, 2012).

As in the past, a correlation was found between insecurity and cultivation; that is, farmers in insecure areas were more likely to grow opium poppy. Other reasons given for growing were “high income from little land” (20 percent), “to improve living condition (14 percent), and “poverty” (13 percent).¹¹

UNODC cites government prohibition as the single most important reason as to why farmers had given up growing (21 percent). Other reasons for not growing were varied, including that it was against Islam (16 percent), and fear of government (15 percent). Additional reasons included elders or *shura* decision (8 percent), “fear of eradication” (7 percent), and not enough yield (6 percent). “Disease” and “lack of water” were cited as important reasons during 2011, but much less so in 2012. Among those who had never grown opium poppy, the majority (60 percent) cited Islam’s prohibition as the main reason.

The reasons for growing or not growing are based on a pooled national sample, and therefore do not capture the significant local differences that exist across Afghanistan.

In fact, both for growers and non-growers, some of the reasons overlapped or reinforced each other. Especially for survey respondents unfamiliar with weighting or ranking responses, it is difficult to interpret the meaning of “most important.” When respondents refer to “high sale price,” “high income from little land,” “to improve living condition,” and “poverty,” in a sense they are all referring to the same thing – positive livelihoods outcomes.

3.2 History of cultivation in Balkh and Badakhshan

As in all areas of Afghanistan, opium poppy cultivation in Balkh and Badakhshan has fluctuated often dramatically from year to year, sometimes in sync with each other and with national trends and sometimes counter to each other and national trends. In both provinces, there has traditionally been some cultivation either for local use (Balkh and Badakhshan) or as a cash crop (Badakhshan). In fact, in Badakhshan until as late as the 1970s, there had been an official Afghan government trading company which purchased opium. Expansion of areas cultivated which occurred in both provinces after the mid-1990s followed different paths due to the differing political situations in each.

“Poppy-free” Balkh

In Balkh, after 1994, cultivation, which had previously been limited and for local use primarily among Turkmen, expanded in a number of Pashtun villages to the west of Mazar, primarily in Chimtal District, and became more oriented towards the external market. Pain¹² ascribes the expansion of cultivation and its location to a number of factors, including: access to the output market, itself related at least in part to ethnic linkages; and, distribution of increasingly scarce water resources further exacerbated by the breakdown of traditional mechanisms for water management due to the years of conflict. Pain notes that in the (upstream) areas with greater water availability, opium poppy was an additional highly profitable cash crop, while in the (downstream) areas with a scarcity of water, poppy became a strategy for achieving food security. During the Taliban period, cultivation continued to expand in the districts of Char Bolak, Chimtal, and Balkh, all of which lie west of Mazar, until the Taliban 2000 edict banning production nationwide.

As in most provinces, following the fall of the Taliban in 2001, cultivated areas expanded in Balkh, again concentrated largely in the three districts of Balkh, Char Bolak, and Chimtal, perhaps due to the ethnic linkages which facilitated trade. Pain notes the role of district and other government officials in collecting taxes on the local opium trade and in protecting local clients and allies from eradication and other threats.¹³ Pain also suggests that the

11 UNODC/MCN, “Afghanistan Opium Survey 2012.”

12 Pain, “The Spread of Opium Cultivation”; Pain, “Let Them Eat Promises.”

13 Pain, “Let Them Eat Promises.”

wealth generated by opium poppy played a role in the consolidation of power which in turn contributed to the relative stability of Balkh, noting that the surplus it generated:

...enabled a consolidation of power structures within the province given the extent to which the informal has blended with and consolidated formal institutions. There is evidence to suggest that the relative consolidation of power within Balkh and the relative security that it has achieved is more likely to have been built out of the opium economy rather than emerged despite it.¹⁴

Since 2007, Balkh has been officially “poppy-free,” a status which it maintained in 2012, despite some conflicting information.¹⁵ As documented elsewhere, the reduction in poppy cultivation in Balkh was achieved largely through coercion by the governor, who achieved plaudits (i.e. “model governor”) from the international community for stepping up and taking on this unpopular position. As will be discussed below, regardless of his motives, Governor Atta has had the ability to enforce the ban in most areas. While there have been widespread rumours of cultivation in the three districts (plus the east bank of the river in Sholgara District), insecurity in these areas makes the rumours hard to confirm. The question of whether the suppression of cultivation will endure over time continues to be of interest since poppy-free status was first achieved in 2007.

Fluctuating Badakhshan

Badakhshan has historically been both a producer and consumer of opium. Addiction in the province, especially in remote Wakhan and Shegnan districts, is considered high, in part due to use of opiates for medical reasons. Production and trade accelerated during the *jihad* years, and provided resources for both the war effort and the more self-interested pursuits of local commanders and other leaders.

Some consider Badakhshan’s opium to be of the highest quality in Afghanistan. Due to its proximity to the Tajikistan border, since the late 1990s the province has also been a location for processing and trafficking heroin. There seem to be fewer and weaker links between the opium economy and the Taliban and other insurgent groups in Badakhshan than in other opium-producing areas — although narcotics smuggling networks may also deal in weapons which are ultimately used by insurgent groups.

As Badakhshan was the only one of Afghanistan’s current provinces which never fell under Taliban control,¹⁶ cultivation and trade naturally expanded under the control of commanders who opposed the Taliban. Badakhshan was therefore not affected by the 2000 Taliban national prohibition on cultivation, and cultivation in the province flourished, increasing by 158 percent in the following year and producing a striking statistical change: In 2001 Badakhshan contributed 79 percent of national cultivated area, a sharp increase from three percent in 2000. Furthermore, in 2003, when total national opium production had rebounded, Badakhshan was second only to Helmand as an opium-producing province.¹⁷

A number of other factors such as the easing of the seven-year drought and changes in the regional market for opium also contributed to the expansion of cultivation in the province post-2001. Since then, annual cultivation has increased and decreased; Badakhshan came close to achieving “poppy-free” status in 2008, after two years in which cultivated area

14 Pain, “Let Them Eat Promises.”

15 The determination of “poppy-free” is made based upon UNODC’s “Annual Opium Poppy Survey.” The US government’s Crime and Narcotics Center estimates that 640 ha were cultivated in Balkh in 2011-12. Technically, a province remains “poppy-free” if identified cultivation does not exceed 100 ha, which means rumours of “some” cultivation are not especially useful.

16 The other province, Panjshir, was created in 2004 out of Parwan Province.

17 UNODC figures as cited in Mansfield, “Evidence from the Field”; David Mansfield, “Governance, Security and Economic Growth: The Determinants of Opium Poppy Cultivation in the Districts of Jurm and Baharak in Badakhshan” (Kabul: GTZ, 2007).

fell by 98 percent to only 200 hectares (ha). Development agency reports attributed the decline to the substitution of other crops for opium due to the efforts of assistance programs. While governance and security factors such as counter-narcotics programmes did discourage cultivation, it is more likely that the decline was due to a confluence of factors, including: economic ones that affected the profitability of poppy such as a shift in the relative price of opium and other crops and an increase in labour wage rates; and, agronomic ones such as low yields brought about by too much or too little rain and untimely cold weather.¹⁸

Since 2008, however, cultivated area has once again expanded. Some attribute this to the lack of delivery on promised aid in exchange for reducing cultivation. Still, in 2011, cultivated area was measured to be only 1,700 ha, or 11 percent of what it was at its peak in 2004. Unlike Balkh, where cultivation is concentrated in just a few districts, in Badakhshan opium poppy is dispersed across the province. Moreover, annual changes in cultivation tend to be highly variable by district.¹⁹ In 2012, fungus found in areas in the south (especially Helmand) may have increased the significance of Badakhshan's crop.

As a remote province with international borders, Badakhshan has also been important for processing and trafficking opiates. This has affected political relationships within the province as well as between the province and Kabul. It is generally acknowledged that significant trafficking cannot take place without the connivance or at least the tolerance of local officials. One observer referred to a "joint extraction regime," whereby officials in the security forces at the central level managed the appointments of "friendly" local officials who along with local commanders managed the trade.²⁰ According to one observer, "good" officials cannot live in these areas.²¹ With such a lucrative arrangement for all concerned, there are few, if any, incentives that could lead to a reduction.

3.3 In place of poppy

There has been speculation that in some areas where opium poppy cultivation has been suppressed, *chars* (marijuana) which has come under much less government pressure, has supplanted it. While not nearly as significant in the rural economy as opium, *chars* represents an element of livelihoods strategies in some areas. Although there is not a current UNODC Cannabis Survey, some information can be gleaned from previous surveys, including the 2011 commercial one.²² UNODC counts 23 of 34 provinces, including Balkh and Badakhshan, as being "at risk" for commercial, mono-crop cultivation. While UNODC referred to levels of cultivation as "stable" and did not see evidence of "substantive change," their own data show a 38 percent increase in the number of households cultivating *chars* and an increase from 17 to 21 provinces in which cultivation takes place. UNODC ascribes the increase to "dramatic" price increases which, considering lower levels of labour as compared with opium poppy, make *chars* more attractive than opium. UNODC's optimistic view seems to be because while the number of cultivating households has increased, the average cultivated area has actually decreased. In other words, there are more growers, but they are of a smaller-scale. The numbers of households or villages growing *chars* is also far below those growing opium poppy. Also, UNODC suggests that growers actually plant intermittently or "sporadically"

18 Mansfield, "Evidence from the Field."

19 Historical trends of cultivation at sub-provincial levels are made more difficult by the recent subdivision of districts such as Jurm and Baharak. Prior to 2001, Badakhshan was composed of 13 districts, but in 2006 the same provincial area was divided into 28 districts. Mansfield, "Evidence from the Field," attributes some of the variation in district cultivation to changes in the measurement methodology and the possible failure of the methodology to keep up with changes in administrative (district) divisions.

20 Fabrizio Foschini. "Campaign Trail 2010 (1): Badakhshan - drugs, border crossings and parliamentary seats," *Afghan Analysts Network*, <http://aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=833>, 19 June 2010.

21 Interview with international NGO security advisor, Kabul.

22 UNODC/MCN, "Afghanistan: Survey of Commercial Cannabis Cultivation and Production 2011" (Kabul: UNODC/MCN, 2012). There are additional methodological issues which also suggest that conclusions be drawn with caution.

rather than every year, and that there can be significant opportunity costs associated with producing the crop (i.e., in needing both seasons of the year, which prohibits the planting of a winter crop), which means that the cultivation of *chars* is “self-limiting.”

UNODC notes that commercial cultivation has shifted from the traditional areas of the north to the south (40 percent of area), especially to the insecure areas. This reinforces the complicated correlation between cultivation of and trade in opium and *chars*. In 2011, for instance, 58 percent of *chars*-growing households reported having grown opium poppy in the previous season. UNODC also suggests tentatively that the superior quality of *chars* produced historically in the north was no longer the case.

Reasons for both growing and not-growing *chars* were roughly similar to those for poppy, although “personal consumption” was reported more frequently as the reason for growing *chars*. “High price” was cited by nearly three-quarters of growers. For those not growing it currently and those who never did, reasons were generally similar; significant reported factors were social (against Islam) or fear (government ban). The lack of water and land were the second most important reasons for not growing *chars*. Also, between 2010 and 2011, far fewer farmers said that the government’s prohibition was a factor in influencing their decision not to grow.²³ UNODC reports that 64 percent of farmers who stopped growing *chars* substituted other crops, although only one percent named opium poppy as a substitute.²⁴

UNODC also suggested that in the non-southern regions, *chars* was allocated to a smaller percentage of land given to cash crops, meaning that outside of the south there were more alternatives to *chars* (and opium).

3.4 Policy and programme issues looking forward

Perhaps due to the perceived success in reductions and personnel changes in some donor governments, the tone and intensity of the counter-narcotics debate has quieted down in the last four years. In fact, some feel that the issue has virtually vanished from the policy agenda. It is hard to see, however, how illicit drugs will not continue to be an important part of the policy landscape, especially in light of the 2014 security transition to full Afghan authority and the related drawdown in international military forces, development spending, and overall political attention. As noted above, some of the (coercive) approaches which have reduced opium poppy cultivation in some areas are not sustainable in the longer-term.

Potential negative ramifications of the Transition on the drugs economy are alarming. Possible scenarios include: increases in production due to the decline in security and government control of rural areas which permitted enforcement of unpopular cultivation bans; increased importance of drug-related income at the local level to maintain patronage and political power as development-related spending declines, especially if the more negative scenarios for the economy are realised; and, decline in interest and leverage at the policy level as the Afghan government and its international partners become pre-occupied with more pressing issues.²⁵ The reductions in cultivation achieved under duress and against the economic conditions prevailing in the rural economy are especially precarious, as there is a limited constituency for maintaining them. The potential further alienation of rural groups is not an attractive prospect for a government trying to remain in control.

23 The UNODC report presents statistical correlations between *chars* cultivation and a range of variables, but given the confounding nature of many variables, they present an unconvincing picture.

24 With the reasons given for not growing *chars*, it can easily be questioned whether farmers would admit to substituting the more banned and more serious opium for *chars*.

25 William Byrd and David Mansfield, “Drugs in Afghanistan—A Forgotten Issue? Implications and Risks for Transition,” USIP Peacebrief (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2012).

In Balkh and Badakhshan provinces, a number of the complex dynamics briefly described above have the potential to be played out. It is difficult to identify any factors which could reduce cultivation. In Balkh, with opium poppy cultivation concentrated in the insecure areas of the province, any reduction in control and decrease in government presence is likely to result in increased cultivation, especially if there is potential to make deals and settlements that confine insecurity to those areas of the province. Pressure to relax the suppression of cultivation is also likely to be exacerbated in proportion to the contraction in the economy of Mazar, the strength of which many feel has allowed the imposition of policies which have harmed agricultural incomes and livelihoods. Also, any disintegration of the relationship between provincial power holders and the Kabul government and its international supporters has the potential to further reduce the motivation to suppress cultivation. In Badakhshan, where insurgents have a limited presence, but where local rivalries are numerous, further reduction in the presence or effectiveness of the government and increased fragmentation due to political rivalries would prepare the ground for further expansion in cultivation. Given the dependence of much of the population on income derived from employment in the Afghan National Police (ANP), NGOs, and other institutions supported by international funding, reductions in funding are likely to increase pressure for yet another alternative to this already alternative livelihood.

4. Provincial context

While both provinces have been significant areas for cultivating and trafficking opium, Balkh and Badakhshan present vastly different physical, social, and historical contexts, which have had important implications for how the opium economy has unfolded in each province. This in turn would also influence the types of policies likely to effect a sustainable transition away from opium in each province.

In short, Balkh is blessed with a strategic and advantageous location, relatively plentiful water and irrigation resources, and a long history of serving as a major trading centre. Badakhshan, on the other hand, is limited by its isolated location with challenging terrain, a mountain economy with little scope for trade beyond smuggling, and high seismic risks.

Balkh has been counted as “poppy-free” since 2007, while Badakhshan has not achieved that status.

4.1 Balkh Province

Balkh Province²⁶ lies in a strategic location bordering Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to the north (see Map 1). Administratively, present-day Balkh is divided into 14 *woleswalis* (districts). Although the geographic boundaries for Balkh Province (sometimes in history officially called Mazar-e Sharif Province) have varied, the provincial centre of Mazar-e Sharif has been a significant hub throughout history. Afghanistan’s fourth largest city, Mazar serves as the *de facto* political, cultural, and economic centre of northern Afghanistan. Although this status is currently informal, at various times in Afghan history it was formally the case, including during the 1930s and during the 1980s and 1990s (under President Najibullah and General Abdul Rashid Dostum). According to official statistics, 36 percent of Balkh’s population lives in urban areas, the majority of which (82 percent) reside in Mazar.²⁷ In recent years, the residential and industrial footprint of the city has spread massively, especially along the corridor leading eastwards to the new railway freight port at Naibabad and the border at Hairatan, westwards in the direction of Dehdadi and the growing military installation, and southwards in the formerly unoccupied areas which today have seen massive real estate development. This expansion, much of which has been fuelled by a boom in the trade, transportation, and construction sectors, has led to a very active market in land. Mazar’s relative stability and strong economic performance has drawn population into the city. The current estimated population of 357,100 is rapidly approaching three times the UN’s 1988 estimate of 131,000.

Economy

Balkh’s population of 1.2 million makes it Afghanistan’s fourth most populous province. Balkh, especially the city of Mazar-e Sharif, has thrived since the fall of the Taliban, and is often counted as a post-2001 success story with respect to security and economic development in general. Mazar’s historical status as a major trading centre was enhanced during the 1979-2001 years of conflict, when except for a few periods of instability and sporadic violence, it was relatively peaceful. Mazar therefore boomed after the fall of the Taliban, especially from 2004 when the appointment of Atta Noor Mohammad as governor resolved a long-festering power struggle and ushered in an era of stability.

Mazar is the location of regional commands for the Afghanistan National Army (ANA), Afghanistan National Police (ANP), and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), as well as the United

26 Provincial background on Balkh draws on material prepared by Mervyn Patterson for Paul Fishstein, “Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan’s Balkh Province” (Medford, MA: Tufts University Feinstein International Center, 2010).

27 Central Statistics Organization, “Population Estimation 2011-12,” <http://cso.gov.af/en/page/6070> (accessed 26 October 2012).

Nations (UN). The massive ISAF base at Camp Marmal, situated adjacent to the Mazar-e Sharif Airport, is the focal point for the international military forces as they consolidate across the northern part of the country. It is also a key node for the withdrawal of NATO equipment through Uzbekistan.

Additional significant towns in the province are Balkh, Dehdadi, and Hairatan, the latter being the significant border crossing with Uzbekistan. Hairatan gained additional economic and political importance when it became the chief crossing point for NATO's northern supply route after Pakistan closed its borders to NATO traffic following the killing of 24 Pakistani soldiers in November 2011. Even before that, however, it accounted for almost half of Afghanistan's inbound trade,²⁸ and therefore for significant amounts of customs revenue. Approximately two-thirds of Balkh Province's collected revenues come from taxes on imports and exports.²⁹

The agricultural economy of Balkh is based mainly on wheat, fruits, and nuts. Balkh has the second largest area (after Faryab) devoted to wheat, with slightly over one-third being irrigated and the rest being the relatively unproductive *lalmi* (rain-fed).³⁰ Balkh also is a leading producer of almonds and pomegranates.³¹ Balkh was historically a major producer of cotton, although during the years of conflict and drought the industry collapsed to virtually nothing. There is some evidence, however, that cotton has been making a comeback. Some of the credit for this positive development is given to the Balkh Gin and Press³² which had provided seeds, inputs, loans, and other types of support, although it is now closed, in part due to their inability to procure an adequate volume of raw cotton at the fixed prices. A number of small, private oil presses had opened around Mazar which had probably hurt Balkh Gin and Press by absorbing much of its supply of raw cotton, although some complained that the machinery used by the smaller presses could not produce good *kunjara* (cotton-seed cake) for which there is high demand for animal feed. Balkh's other significant agricultural outputs include melons, barley, rice, sesame, and flax.

Due to its location and consequent Soviet influence, Balkh Province was the site for a number of important industrial developments built or supported by the Soviets, including the Kod-e Barq fertiliser plant, Balkh Textiles, Balkh Cotton and Vegetable Oil, and the Mazar Silo. Many of these pre-war industrial developments have become degraded or inactive due to a combination of conflict and neglect.

People and society

Social and human capital indicators in the province are mixed. The reported literacy rate of 44 percent (54 percent for males, 32 percent for females) is above the national average of 28 percent (38 percent for males, 19 percent for females).³³ Balkh was ranked at just about the national average on the Ministry of Public Health's annual assessment of delivery of health services.³⁴ As

28 Asian Development Bank (ADB), "ADB-Funded Railway to Help Afghanistan Improve Regional Links, Boost Growth," <http://www.adb.org/news/adb-funded-railway-help-afghanistan-improve-regional-links-boost-growth>, 30 September 2009.

29 According to official trade statistics, while \$500 million worth of goods were imported from Uzbekistan, only USD two million were exported. As with most official statistics, trade numbers should be taken with caution. In this case, the trade totals may include NATO imports and are for all of Uzbekistan, although the latter may not be so problematic given that Hairatan is the only direct crossing.

30 Central Statistics Organization, "Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2010-2011" (Kabul: CSO, 2011).

31 In 2008-09, Balkh was fourth highest producer of almonds and the second highest producer of pomegranates.

32 The Balkh Gin and Press was one of the first state-owned enterprises to be privatised. It was supposed to purchase raw cotton to produce both cotton fibre as well as cooking oil and *kunjara* as by-products of the cotton seed.

33 Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), "Balkh Provincial Profile (in Balkh Provincial Development Plan)" (Kabul: MRRD, 2007).

34 "Afghanistan Health Sector Balanced Scorecard 2008: A toolkit to calculate the indicators," Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health and Indian Institute of Health Management Research, 2008, http://www.imgforhealth.org/sites/imgforhealth.org/files/JHSPH-IIHMR_BalanceScorecard_1.pdf. The five provinces of Farah, Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, and Zabul were not assessed due to security conditions.

is the case throughout Afghanistan, medical facilities are concentrated in the urban areas, in this case especially in Mazar. In 2007, the Central Statistics Organisation (CSO) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) put Balkh ninth of 34 provinces on a composite set of indicators, including geographic accessibility, access to social and cultural services (i.e., health, education, media), markets, and economic activities.³⁵ The province's gender indicators are a bit worse than the national average. While Mazar's economy has thrived, provincial indicators are somewhat worse than the national average for poverty rate, depth of poverty, and calorie deficiency. The unemployment rate is above the national average, while the under-employment rate is below, which conveys conflicting messages about the labour market.³⁶

While Tajiks make up the province's largest ethnic group, Balkh is ethnically heterogeneous, with significant populations of all of Afghanistan's major ethnic groups (Tajik, Pashtun, Uzbek, Hazara, Turkmen, and Arab³⁷). As elsewhere in Afghanistan, with the partial exception of the urban areas, settlements tend to be organised along ethnic lines. Ethnic groups in Balkh are a mix of indigenous and transplanted, albeit from as much as more than a century ago. Balkh's Pashtun groups are the descendants of those who Amir Abdur Rahman Khan settled in the north in the late nineteenth century as part of his move to consolidate Kabul's control of the hinterlands while simultaneously removing rebellious groups from the south. Most Uzbeks and Turkmen are indigenous to the area, although some are the descendants of those who fled south from the Soviet Union during the post-revolutionary period (1917-1930). Hazaras are largely indigenous, although some groups have come to the province during different periods in response to different conditions. Many of the Hazaras in Sholgara were pushed out of Uruzgan during the process of state consolidation by rulers Ahmad Shah Durrani and Amir Abdur Rahman Khan in the 18th and 19th centuries. Some arrived in search of economic opportunities in the 1950s and 1960s. Many others came to Mazar in the 1990s for economic, political, and security reasons. Finally, the Arab groups are mostly descendants of groups who came south from Central Asia in the late 19th century.

Especially in rural areas, ethnicity, political processes, and access to resources (especially land and water) are highly linked. The flat irrigated zone created by the Hazdah Nahr (Eighteen Canal) system which utilises water from the Balkh River and renders cultivable the areas that are now Balkh, Chimtal, and Char Bolak districts (and parts of Fayzabad and Aqcha districts in neighbouring Jawzjan Province), has a mixed ethnicity, although the upstream areas with the most fertile land are predominantly Pashtun (Balkh District), with some Arabs (Dehdadi District). The areas further to the north and downstream are largely Arab or Uzbek, with pockets of Hazaras (in Dawlatabad and Char Bolak districts). Those at the downstream ends of irrigation sources, with marginal lands and limited access to water are Uzbeks and Turkmen, and Arabs in some areas (Dawlatabad District). The Balkh River valley (Sholgara District) has a core Uzbek population along with Arabs and Hazaras, and sizeable Pashtun pockets, the latter located especially along the east bank of the river. Mazar-e Sharif itself is mixed. It originally had a Tajik core, although it now has sizable other communities (e.g., Hazara).

These historical settlements and their related economic dimensions continue to strongly influence political allegiances and processes within the province. They also inform the belief that the lack of a neutral arbiter in the form of the Afghan state has led to injustice in the allocation of resources, including dispossession of water and other common property resources.

Politics and history

During the *jihad* period (1979-92), ethnic heterogeneity in addition to a significant leftist orientation of parts of the population due to the proximity of the Soviet Union, and more

35 Central Statistics Office/United Nations Population Fund (CSO/UNFPA), "A Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile" (Kabul: CSO/UNFPA, 2007).

36 World Bank/Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Afghanistan: Provincial Briefs" (Kabul: WB/GolRA, 2011).

37 "Arab" refers to groups who claim descent from the Arabs who brought Islam to Afghanistan starting in the seventh century. They have been assimilated, and speak Dari and/or, in parts of the north, Uzbeki. They do not speak Arabic.

important, the Soviet-built industrial establishments, contributed to the presence of numerous political and military factions, and inhibited the formation of a unified or dominant group. The fall of the Najibullah government in 1992 was precipitated by the revolt of a group of northern army officers, including General Abdul Rashid Dostum in Jawzjan Province. When this group linked up with *mujahidin* groups it set in motion a series of events that led to Najibullah's fall.³⁸

During the 1992-96 *mujahiddin* government, Mazar escaped the intense violence which enveloped Kabul. Despite putting together an administration composed of the various *mujahiddin* factions, Balkh could not escape the instability and competition between the nominally allied government partners, mainly over the distribution over power and resources. Even after the Taliban capture of Kandahar in 1994 and Kabul in 1996, Mazar was administered by the General Dostum-led Jumbish-e Milli. The administration was relatively stable, although it is remembered as being highly abusive due to the free rein given to local commanders. The situation changed in May 1997, when the defection of one of Dostum's commanders allowed the Taliban to capture Mazar, initiating a year of violence and fragmentation with seemingly endless rounds of killings, mostly along ethnic or sectarian lines, and exacerbated by shifting alliances and the arrival of outsiders. The Taliban were expelled by local forces in September 1997, but again captured Mazar in August 1998. While there was subsequently some limited resistance during the subsequent period called *mawqawmat* (resistance), the Taliban remained essentially in control until November 2001, when they were expelled from Mazar by commanders linked up with U.S. forces.

With the establishment of the Karzai government in Kabul, the various parties and factions resumed their inevitable competition for political, military, and economic resources and power. The main source of instability was the ongoing conflict between Atta Mohammad Noor and General Dostum, backed by their respective political parties, Jamiat and Jumbish. While Mazar was relatively stable during 2002 and 2003, the rural areas saw on-going and widespread conflict due to competition and shifting alliances. In the fall of 2003, in response to Jamiat-Jumbish confrontations in a number of areas of the north, Kabul and ISAF intervened by imposing a ceasefire and demanding the cantonment of heavy weapons and the demobilisation of senior commanders. With this intervention and the appointment of Atta as governor in July 2004, Balkh Province entered its most stable period since 1978.

The recent history of Balkh Province is often told as closely linked with the dominance of Governor Atta. While the underlying ethnic and political fissures remain, Atta has kept the province under close control through various means. The core element of his apparent strategy has been to "officialise" control over the province by ensuring the appointment of his people in the police and administration. All elements of the police at district and provincial levels as well as other civil service positions are in one way or another beholden to him. This has meant that most posts are filled by Jamiatis. As one observer somewhat critically put it, "having transplanted his militia clients into powerful positions through the provincial administration, he maintains a monopoly over violence as well as control over illicit activity."³⁹ The police and other security organs have remained under Jamiat control, although the behaviour of the police has been maintained at a benign level. Atta's strategy has also been characterised as "dual track," involving loyalty to Kabul and the concept of central government on the one hand, and maintaining local control and influence on the other.⁴⁰ A large part of showing loyalty to Kabul has involved his role in suppressing opium poppy cultivation, which gained him kudos and the label of "model governor" from the international community. This has been despite the lingering accusations that he and his colleagues had been involved in the trade. At the same time, Atta has successfully projected the aura of an efficient administration, which has again garnered praise as well as additional funding of civil service positions.

38 It is worth noting that the government forces commanded by these officers had originally been militias or local "self-defence forces" which, as part of Najibullah's strategy, had been supported and incorporated into the official forces. Given the provenance of many of these forces, some were considered quite brutal.

39 Dipali Mukhopadhyay, "Warlords as Bureaucrats: The Afghan Experience" (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009).

40 Mukhopadhyay, "Warlords as Bureaucrats."

Atta has so far remained in his post, periodic rumours swirling about his possible replacement notwithstanding and despite his outspoken support for Dr Abdullah in the 2009 presidential election against considerable pressure from President Karzai to get into line. The conventional wisdom is that President Karzai is reluctant to make a move that would be potentially so destabilising, although one can easily imagine political actors making the argument for placing a more loyal person in Balkh with the approach of the critical year of 2014, which will bring both the security transition and presidential elections. Although there is a massive and growing presence of international military forces (IMF) at Camp Marmal, in part related to the consolidation of IMF bases across the north, Balkh was in the first tranche of provinces which transitioned to Afghan security responsibility, reflecting greater stability relative to elsewhere in the country.

While the appointment of Governor Atta in 2004 marked the end of overt conflict, many of the underlying drivers of insecurity remain unresolved. The current political and security situation continues to be influenced by the above factors as well as the legacy of the years of fighting, and many of these maintained outbreaks of conflict through the 1990s and into the post-2001 period. One needs to look no further than the current physical and ethnic geography of insecurity (and in turn opium poppy cultivation) to see how these historical factors continue to inform the present. As described above, especially since Balkh became “poppy-free” in 2007, the centres of cultivation have been the largely-Pashtun areas of Char Bolak, Chimtāl, and parts of Balkh District.

4.2 Badakhshan Province

Unlike Balkh Province, Badakhshan lies in a non-advantageous yet still strategic location in far northeastern Afghanistan, bordering the provinces of Takhar and Nuristan to the west and south respectively, Tajikistan to the north, Pakistan to the southeast, and China to the east at the tip of the isolated Wakhan Corridor (see Map 2.) Badakhshan’s isolated location and poor infrastructure have influenced the course of development in the province. With a land area of 44,836 km sq, it contains 6.87 percent of Afghanistan’s land. With a population of 904,700 (3.6 percent of national population), it is Afghanistan’s tenth most populous province.

Administratively, Badakhshan is divided into 28 *woleswalis*, a number which was increased from 12 in 2005, and which reflects political considerations rather than administrative realities. Outside of the provincial centre of Faizabad and the municipality of Jurm, the rest of the province is overwhelmingly rural (96 percent of population). Badakhshan’s population density is seventh from lowest, with 90 percent of the urban population located in Faizabad.⁴¹

People and land

Based on language spoken, the CSO and UNFPA⁴² estimate that 77 percent of Badakhshan’s population is Tajik, followed by Uzbeks and Ismailis, the latter located in an arc that swings from across the border in Tajikistan down into Afghanistan’s central highlands. There are also small numbers of Kyrgyz and Wakhis who inhabit the inaccessible Wakhan corridor. While Badakhshan is predominantly Tajik, the physical geography of the province has contributed to enduring strong local and regional identities.

Human capital indicators for Badakhshan are mixed. Literacy and school enrolment rates for both males and females are relatively high and above the national average, while the girl to boy enrolment ratio of .94 is the highest in the country.⁴³ Perhaps as a consequence of Badakhshan never having been under Taliban control, many of its educational institutions survived, the

41 Central Statistics Office/United Nations Population Fund (CSO/UNFPA), “Provincial Profile - Badakhshan” (Kabul: Regional Rural Economic Regeneration Assessment and Strategies, Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation, and Development and GRM International, 2006).

42 Central Statistics Office/United Nations Population Fund (CSO/UNFPA), “Badakhshan: A Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile” (Kabul: CSO/UNFPA, 2004).

43 Ministry of Economy, World Bank, Australian Government, “Afghanistan: Provincial Briefs” (Kabul: MoE/WB/Australian Government, 2011).

province has the tenth highest literacy rate in the country. In the 18th-19th centuries, Badakhshan was one of Afghanistan's centres of literature, especially poetry. While school infrastructure has been improved since 2001, the great distances and challenging geography of the province remain a deterrent to education, especially for the poor, for whom this imposes often prohibitive economic costs. Nearly 50 percent of students travel between two and five hours per day to attend school. As is the case throughout Afghanistan, the quality of education is quite variable, both from the perspective of quality of teaching and the availability of books and materials. Both of these are exacerbated by the remoteness of most of the province, as it is difficult to persuade qualified teachers to take posts in far-flung areas.

Largely due to limited economic opportunities within the province, Badakhshan has historically been the source of both internal (within Afghanistan) and external migration, both short-term (i.e., seasonal) and long-term. While Balkh's location provides a comparative advantage for licit trade, Badakhshan's provides one for smuggling and illicit trade.

Many areas of the province are extremely remote and can only be accessed with difficulty during most of the year and not at all during the winter. Some districts are more easily accessed from Tajikistan than from Faizabad. Not surprisingly, Badakhshan has been a key trading route, although as noted above much of this trade is illicit and/or involving drugs, weapons, or other illicit commodities. The recent paving of the 177 kilometre road between Taloqan and Faizabad has reduced the travel time from 14 to three hours, and has likewise reduced the wear and tear on vehicles and therefore transport costs.

Due to its mountainous terrain, Badakhshan is considered to have the highest seismic risk in Afghanistan. Most recently, in June 2012 in neighbouring Baghlan Province over 80 people were killed. Previous recent major earthquakes include two in March 2002 which killed more than 1,150 in the surrounding provinces and destroyed at least 300 houses in Badakhshan and Takhar, and the May 1998 event which killed at least 4,000 persons in Badakhshan and Takhar.⁴⁴ The harsh winter of 2011-12 brought even more than the usual high number of avalanches.

Due to its mountainous terrain (roughly 90 percent is considered "mountainous or semi-mountainous"), Badakhshan is poorly endowed with cultivable agricultural land, both in the aggregate and also for the average landowner. Landholdings tend to be smaller than the national average and according to some observers the practice of share-cropping is increasing. Water is relatively abundant; two of the major watersheds in the northern Amu Darya system, the Panj and the Kokcha, lie within the province. However, there are no major modern irrigation systems, largely due to the unsuitability of the landscape for large-scale irrigation works. Most irrigated land is watered through channelling of river or spring water. Due to the lack of major irrigation development and the generally backward state of agriculture in the province, much of the available water is not used but rather flows out of the province.

Agriculture and economic activity

Because most of the province lies at a high altitude, there is a short growing season and the cold climate imposes limitations on many types of agriculture. In addition, in many areas the climate only allows a single (short) cropping season. Crops tend to be harvested later in the year, although due to variations in elevation the annual cropping calendar varies across the province. To help overcome the short growing season, there has been some introduction of the types of plastic tunnels which have been used successfully elsewhere in Afghanistan, including Balkh. Staple crops in Badakhshan include wheat (irrigated and rain-fed), and depending on the area, rice, barley, maize, flax, and, of course, opium poppy. Fruits include apricots, walnuts, pistachios, mulberries, melons, and watermelons. Fodder crops include alfalfa (*rishqa*), Persian clover (*shaftal*), and grass pea (*patak*).

Livestock and animal husbandry are important sources of livelihoods in the province, although due to the high cost of fodder it is almost impossible for sedentary households to own animals without

44 US Geological Survey (USGS), "Historic World Earthquakes, Afghanistan," http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/world/historical_country.php#afghanistan.

land on which to graze them. Due to conditions in the province, herds are vulnerable to periodic droughts and harsh winters. The effects of the 2011-12 winter on livestock are discussed below.

Although poor in terms of agricultural land, Badakhshan is well-endowed with mineral and other natural resources. Significant coal reserves are said to occur in the province, but the most important assets are gems and minerals, including lapis lazuli, as well as gold, salt, mica, limestone, and coal. The largest lapis lazuli mines border Panjshir Province at Sar-e Sang in Kuran-wa Munjan District, just south of Khash. The mines provide estimated employment for 1,000 or more persons from several districts who work eight to nine months per year. Illegal mining of lapis has historically been a source of revenue for insurgents (e.g., *mujahidin* during the Soviet occupation, Northern Alliance during the *mawqawmat* period against the Taliban), who typically smuggled uncut stone to Pakistan. While in theory (and on paper) mining has been formalised, there are still concerns about both the physical process by which stone is extracted and the way the benefits are distributed.⁴⁵ Most stones are still exported informally in uncut form to Pakistan where more of the value added is accrued, rather than in Afghanistan. According to some estimates, only ten percent of the final value for lapis is generated within Afghanistan. Also, the informal and often crude ways in which minerals are extracted (i.e., with dynamite and other explosives rather than technically) damages the resource and reduces the long-term anticipated flow of revenue. Respondents made numerous accusations about the market for rights to the mines. One version had the rights to mining for one year being purchased from the state for \$72,000, and then re-sold to Panjshiri traders for more than three times that amount. The brother of former commander and current member of *wolesi jirga* member Zalmai Khan was in charge of the ANP unit responsible for security at the mine, and was also said to be in charge of a wide range of "services," including transport, access, and security. At one time the province also contained significant forests, but due to the high reliance on wood for fuel and smuggling of timber into Pakistan, much of the forest has been denuded.

Lack of electricity is considered a major constraint to the development of additional economic activity. There are currently no connections to the national electrical grid, and even in Faizabad all electricity is provided by generator, either by the government or by private entrepreneurs, at prohibitive rates. During May 2012 the price of one kilowatt of electricity in Faizabad was 50 Afs,⁴⁶ whereas in Kabul the official price was 3 Afs. Micro-hydro and solar projects, many installed under the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) have dotted the countryside, but the utility of these small facilities for economic enterprises is limited. Other than agriculture and the mining activities mentioned above, the limited economic activities in the province are small scale and informal, and there are no major industrial developments. Many products formerly produced in the province (i.e., felt rugs, *gelams*, clothing, other wool products) have been displaced by cheaper substitute products from the region (e.g., China, Iran, and Pakistan). According to some observers, due to the reduced demand for these products, the skills of former producers have been eroded.⁴⁷ Agro-industrial activities in the province include dried fruits and nuts, apiaries, and it appears that in recent years poultry has taken hold in the province and has even successfully competed with imports; this is in contrast to the 2004 CSO/UNFPA study⁴⁸ which claims that there was not a single poultry farm in the province. All in all, observers agree that in Badakhshan, "a rural economy based on licit agricultural production would be unable to sustain the population."⁴⁹

45 Extraction is often done crudely using explosives, which damages the reserves, degrades the long-term benefits from the mines, and results in lower quality stone being exported to Pakistan. There are also plausible accusations that officials informally sell the rights to exploitation to individuals in return for a share of the profit. See Ghanizada, "Concerns over illegal extraction of Badakhshan Lapis mine," in *Khaama Press*, <http://www.khaama.com/concerns-over-illegal-extraction-of-badakhshan-lapis-mine/>, 6 August 2011. Also see, Gul Muhammad Tanha and Hadi Kazimi, "Lapis lazuli extracted improperly in Badakhshan, Pajhwok Afghan News" *Pajhwok News Agency* <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2010/08/23/lapis-lazuli-extracted-improperly-badakhshan#>. UCL, 23 August 2010.

46 Afghan unit of currency. During the research period US\$1 was worth approximately 50 Afs.

47 CSO/UNFPA, "Provincial Profile - Badakhshan."

48 CSO/UNFPA, "Badakhshan: A Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile."

49 UNODC, "Afghanistan: Provincial Profiles," 2 (Kabul: UNODC, 2010).

History and politics

Badakhshan is one of two present-day provinces to never have fallen under Taliban control,⁵⁰ although some believe that the province's fall was imminent at the time of the U.S. invasion in October 2001. The late Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani, who is from Yaftal, was head of the Jamiat-e Islami and the head of the Islamic State of Afghanistan (ISA), which continued to be recognised by the UN through the period of Taliban rule in Kabul. During the latter stages of rule, Faizabad functioned as the capital of the ISA. As Rabbani's chief military commander was Ahmad Shah Massoud from the neighbouring Panjshir valley, Badakhshan became linked with Panjshir in opposition to the Taliban.⁵¹

Unlike in Balkh, no one strongman has emerged post-2001. Fragmentation seems to be the result of the interplay of historical and political factors, including centre-periphery relations, perhaps due to Badakhshan's location on the periphery, and the isolated geography imposed by its mountainous valleys which divide the province, impeding communication and integration, and encouraging natural geographical fiefdoms.

Perhaps due to the existence of ethnic brethren across the border in the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic, sympathies in the province during the Soviet war were divided. The province never became a major battleground, and some districts contributed men to the Afghan army.⁵² A number of the leftist political parties have been active over the years, including the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and Settam-e Milli, as well as its successor Sazman-e inqilabi- zahmatkashan-e Afghanistan (Revolutionary Organisation of Afghanistan's Toilers).⁵³ Many political leaders descended from the historically well-off (landed) families of the province, some going back to the rule of Amanullah. The province's rugged terrain, which included traditional trade (smuggling) routes into northwest Pakistan therefore gave it a key role in the *mujahiddin* supply routes from Pakistan.

As happened in many other places in Afghanistan, when Najibullah's government fell in April 1992, territory was taken over by local commanders. While commanders were nominally allied with the political parties and established alliances among themselves, these were largely transient, flimsy relationships which could be ignored or else dissolved in violence when interests diverged or new opportunities for loot and power presented themselves. The extent to which a command structure of sorts was followed depended very much on time and space. Economic opportunities from smuggling or drug trafficking have been powerful factors. During the 1990s Russia deployed border guards along Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan, ostensibly reflecting concerns about narcotics reaching post-Soviet Russia through Badakhshan. The effectiveness of these guards was questionable, however, and many believed that they themselves were involved in the trade at a time when Russia's economic situation was dire.

During much of the 1990s, fragmentary political tendencies were somewhat tempered by the need to ally against the common Taliban enemy, which was further reinforced by the fact that the Taliban were a predominantly Pashtun movement and Badakhshan predominantly Tajik, with smaller numbers of other groups. However, over the long term this proved insufficient to produce cohesion over the personal and intra-factional squabbling for power and resources.

Partly as a legacy of the *jihad* era when its access to military supplies and finance in Pakistan made it the major player, Jamiat remains the dominant political force in Badakhshan and within the provincial administration. A variety of factors, however, have meant that it is far from a unified, cohesive force. First, the geography and isolated location of much of the province has allowed many traditional, local (feudal) leaders to maintain their local hegemony. Second, a number of areas are the homelands of conservative clergy. (A separate, non-Taliban Islamic emirate was declared in the province.) Third,

50 The other province, Panjshir, was created in 2004 out of Parwan Province.

51 As noted above, until in 2004 Panjshir was a district of Parwan Province.

52 Reflecting the historical linkages, during the 1990s opposition groups fighting the government in Tajikistan came across the Panj River and used the province as a base from which to launch attacks.

53 Foschini, "Campaign Trail 2010 (1): Badakhshan."

in the urban areas the literary traditions noted above have contributed to an educated class, which tended to be relatively liberal and left-leaning. All of these elements pose at least sources of friction, if not challenges to control. They also open up opportunities for local strongmen.⁵⁴

During the *jihad* and Taliban eras, Rabbani maintained a “loose” or even “symbolic” leadership in the province, which functioned through the distribution of patronage in order to maintain the loyalty of local commanders dominating communities.⁵⁵ Rabbani may have retained the “loyalty” of local power holders precisely because he made few demands on them and instead left them to their own devices, which typically involved theft, intimidation, drug trafficking, and contending for more power in their neighbourhoods – the latter of which contains the seeds of conflict. Some attribute the lack of integration in the province evident even today to Rabbani’s lack of interest or skill in developing beyond a patronage based political system. The only consistent element was the selection of officials based on short-term political interests rather than motivation, experience, skills, or merit.

As elsewhere in Afghanistan, the same commanders have maintained significant power and influence, sometimes through becoming part of the state, sometimes through opposing the state, and sometimes both. According to Mansfield, with respect to the security situation in Jurm:

*...many attributed this situation to commanders who held official positions within the political system or were closely linked to senior figures in provincial or national government... there was a general perception in Jurm that the commanders had absorbed the government and not the other way around.*⁵⁶

Some power holders are related to historic elders while others have achieved power through the political struggles of the last 30 years.

Some partly blame the central government for the continuing fragmentation, claiming Kabul has shown more interest in establishing a patronage-fed patrimonial system to serve the interests of the government than in building strong and responsive institutions of governance and services.

Beginning in 2005 (in advance of the first post-2001 parliamentary elections), Kabul is said to have used appointments and other mechanisms to reduce Jamiat’s power in the province. In 2006-07 a number of non-Jamiatis with loyalties to President Karzai rather than Rabbani were appointed to a large number of positions. As noted by one analyst,

*...being able to undermine Rabbani’s authority and influence in his native Badakhshan became increasingly valuable to the Afghan President... by 2005 Karzai was determined to replace local systems of power and patronage, which had autonomous power bases, with an alternative one dependent on Kabul – a typical way of establishing a patrimonial centralized government.*⁵⁷

Short-lived reform initiatives represented by more serious provincial and district appointments were undermined in the pursuit of retaining a hold on the province, which continued the status quo of competing power holders. According to one analysis:

Badakhshan was essentially working like a system of ‘regulated anarchy’: a degree of stability was maintained through a balance of power which was the result of the slow evolution of the political landscape after 1979. Conflict, even violent, occurred but it never led to a collapse of the dominant politico-military system because it was contained through the formation of

54 Foschini “Campaign Trail 2010 (1): Badakhshan.”

55 Antonio Giustozzi and Dominique Orsini, “Centre-periphery relations in Afghanistan: Badakhshan between patrimonialism and institution-building,” *Central Asian Survey* 28, no. 1 (March 2009): 1-16.

56 Mansfield, “Governance, Security and Economic Growth.”

57 Giustozzi and Orsini, “Centre-periphery relations in Afghanistan,” 10.

*alliances and political manoeuvring. The power relations among different players had largely stabilized and violence seemed to be subsiding... Badakhshan seemed to be heading for some kind of political settlement, particularly as far as the Sunni Tajiks were concerned, in which the strongmen were increasingly consolidating their role and recognizing each other.*⁵⁸

As elsewhere in Afghanistan, success in electoral politics depends on a combination of the reputation derived from being a member of a "good family" (e.g., Fawzia Kufi, Latif Pedram) and material resources which can be deployed to bring in supporters. The latter group includes *jihadi* commanders. One analysis of the 2010 parliamentary elections found that more than one-third of identifiable candidates had been commanders during the *jihad* and subsequent civil war period. Moreover, almost all of them had acquired security positions in the post-2001 government.⁵⁹

The political machinations in Badakhshan have not produced a situation conducive to relative stability (e.g., Balkh). Rather, they have both reinforced and possibly exacerbated local conflicts and competition. It goes without saying that it had no positive effect on the building of responsive, transparent government institutions. In sum, the net result of the machinations was "gradual" destabilisation. None of the major players had sufficient ownership at the provincial level to assert full control and be motivated to invest in consolidation. Even at the district level competition among different patrons produced a sense of instability and precariousness which reinforced the willingness of local strongmen to turn into "stationary bandits."⁶⁰

Some of the observations made during the late 1990s still hold true today:

These characters are usually an interesting and paradoxical combination of the sinister, the ruthless and the benign. To a man, they are deeply involved in the business of drugs and guns, but on the other hand they know that they need to have the general support of the people and are not averse to financing public works, or better still save their own ill-gotten gains by attracting humanitarian agencies, the United Nations and NGOs to provide social and agricultural services and food for the people at someone else's expense, while taking some of the credit for themselves. (If not, as is often the case gaining some personal profit from it). The political scene presents a kaleidoscope of constantly changing alliances, misalliances, deals and betrayals that only an interested expert living on the spot can have any hope of following, and that with difficulty. Badakhshan presents a good example of the old Afghan saying that "behind every hillock sits an emperor" (pusht-e har teppe yek padishah neshast).⁶¹

Despite the fragmentation and isolation, Badakhshan is considered relatively stable, although there have been some significant security events in the last several years, and a number of areas are considered unstable and therefore insecure.⁶² Although there is limited insurgent presence, factional competition over smuggling routes and proceeds is the major source of instability in the province. The area considered most insecure is Upper Warduj due to a combination of religious conservatism (some senior Taliban figures from the 1990s were from the area, and a *madrassa* in the town of Tergaran is considered to be a centre of conservative religious ideology), factional politics, drug-related violence, and competition between some of the main commanders. As is often the case, these are often inter-related. There is a lot of competition among members of the three *jihadi* political parties of Mahaz-e Milli, Jamiat, and Hezb-e Islami. The people in Warduj are said to be unhappy with the government because they have been left out, especially relative to Jurm, whose people have been active and are prominent in government - with the benefits that this brings. Jurm has several members of Parliament, while Warduj has none. The main force in Warduj and in fact in western Badakhshan is Zalmai Khan Mujaddedi, a member of the *wolesi jirga*. Although he was previously a Jamiat commander, he is now considered to be a committed Karzai loyalist ("shadow viceroy" in the words of one

58 Giustozzi and Orsini, "Centre-periphery relations in Afghanistan."

59 Foschini, "Campaign Trail 2010 (1): Badakhshan."

60 Giustozzi and Orsini, "Centre-periphery relations in Afghanistan," 13.

61 Anthony Fitzherbert, "Field mission report, Badakhshan" June 1998. With the author's permission.

62 During the research team's visit to the province, an NGO team composed of two international and two Afghan workers was kidnapped in Yaftal-e Sufla district.

analyst⁶³), and the appointment of a number of his loyalists in 2006-07 gave him more control of critical provincial border crossings.⁶⁴ The conflict in Warduj is considered to be due to a number of different factors, including alienation of the ANP commander from the local population and political rivals, as well as the presence of conservative religious elements. A proposal for the introduction of ALP in the area has the potential to further polarise and destabilise.⁶⁵

In Jurm, Khostak has historically been a conflict-laden place, going back to the 1990s. During Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) operations in Warduj, armed opposition groups not from the area are said to cross over into Khostak. At present, there is no government presence, and it is considered the most isolated and underserved area of the district.

The current provincial governor is considered to be less powerful than Mayor Nazir Mohammad of Faizabad, a former Jamiat commander from Yaftal District and former client of Marshall Fahim (and nephew of Burhanuddin Rabbani) who improved his position in the province by acquiring the choice assignment of guarding the outer perimeter of the German-led PRT when it was established in 2004. This enabled him to leverage more power and influence, and there have been accusations that he has used that to intimidate NGOs and international agencies into hiring people connected with him, and to stage rocket attacks to meet his own ends. He is also said to benefit from an alliance with the long-standing deputy governor, who is a nephew of Rabbani. There has been a simmering conflict between the people of Argo and the current mayor of Faizabad City centred on the distribution of land in the new city section of Faizabad.⁶⁶

The district governors are likewise considered to be less significant than the district chiefs of police, including Qari Wadud, currently posted in Jurm but previously in Baharak District, an extremely valuable position in the eastern part of the province which gives it a prime location astride trade and smuggling routes, where he established a strong network of loyalists. Wadud has been accused of links to armed opposition groups in the province. There are reports that Wadud's political fortunes have declined somewhat after he was linked to an attempted suicide bombing targeting his successor, Baharak chief of police (Qomandan Malek) and another official from the Afghan National Border Police.

4.3 Conclusion

As described above, Balkh and Badakhshan differ greatly in their geographic assets, including location, water resources, and agro-ecological potential, and consequently in their historical, political, economic, and social development. All of these inter-related characteristics have in turn affected the history of opium poppy cultivation and trade in the two provinces, and will influence the trajectory it takes in the future.

63 Giustozzi and Orsini, "Centre-periphery relations in Afghanistan."

64 Foschini, "Campaign Trail 2010 (1): Badakhshan."

65 Foschini, "Campaign Trail 2010 (1): Badakhshan." See also "Badakhshan elders averse to local militia," *Pajhwok Afghan News*, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2012/11/18/badakhshan-elders-averse-local-militia-0>, 19 November 2012.

66 During the fieldwork period, there were overnight ISAF operations in Faizabad that took into custody a number of elements from Badakhshan University in Faizabad suspected of being members of the Islamist political party Hizb-ut Tahrir. The operations led to demonstrations, which accused the authorities of arresting only people from Argo.

5. Analysis of situation in surveyed areas

This section describes the areas of fieldwork, the characteristics of the surveyed households, and the livelihoods choices that farmers faced in 2011-12, including whether or not to cultivate opium poppy and other illicit crops.

5.1 Balkh fieldwork areas

In Balkh, fieldwork was conducted in the two adjoining districts of Chimtal and Char Bolak (see Map 3). Even prior to its “poppy-free” status in 2007, Balkh’s concentration of cultivation was primarily in the three districts of Char Bolak, Chimtal, and Balkh. Since 2007, cultivation has been undertaken solely in Char Bolak and Chimtal, with rumours of some minimal cultivation in parts of Balkh and Sholgara districts. The common characteristics of the growing areas are that they are all insecure, predominantly Pashtun, and beyond the easy reach of the government. In Balkh, poppy is typically planted in autumn, with the main harvest starting in late April or early May.

Chimtal and Char Bolak districts lie in the fertile, well-irrigated area to the west of Mazar, and are both easily accessible by decent roads. While Chimtal covers a large area to the west and southwest of Mazar, the main agricultural areas of the district lies in a narrow band west of Mazar and directly borders Char Bolak to the north. The district centre of Chimtal is located 40 kilometres from Mazar and can be accessed by two roads, one paved road from Dehdadi and an unpaved one from Balkh District. Security along the Dehdadi road is good, while the road from Balkh is insecure. The Balkh road passes through largely Pashtun areas, and there are said to be Taliban in the area. Char Bolak’s district centre lies directly north of Chimtal, approximately 45 kilometres from Mazar, between two main roads; the main circular road runs in the direction of Shiberghan, and the other the road runs west from Balkh District centre to Aqcha District in Jawzjan Province.

Chimtal’s population of some 87,600 is distributed across 171 villages, while Char Bolak’s of 77,500 is distributed across 109 villages.⁶⁷ Both districts are ethnically mixed, although with different proportions: Chimtal is approximately 45 percent Tajik and Arab, 24 percent Pashtun, 25 percent Hazara, and five percent Turkmen; while Char Bolak is 50 percent Pashtun, 20 percent Tajik, 20 percent Uzbek, and 10 percent Turkmen and Hazara. Although Chimtal’s population is less than Char Bolak’s, the former is a Grade 3 *woleswali* while the latter is Grade 2.⁶⁸

In neither Chimtal nor Char Bolak did there seem to be the problem of land grabbing common elsewhere in the country. Some respondents attributed the absence of land-grabbing to the low quality of land.

Water woes

Irrigation in both districts relies heavily on canals, with additional reliance, especially in far reaches of Chimtal and the lower-situated Char Bolak, on tubewells when canal water is scarce. The most significant canal in Chimtal is the Nahr-e Imam Bokhari Canal, from which it is estimated that 80 percent of irrigation water in Chimtal comes. The survey team estimated that 67 percent of households in the canal area use it for drinking water, while the rest use wells. The most important canal in Char Bolak is Hazhda Nahr Canal, which provides virtually all of the irrigation water. Drinking water comes largely from wells.

⁶⁷ The number of villages was taken from the Badakhshan Provincial Development Plan. Population figures are taken from CSO, “Population Estimation 2011-12.”

⁶⁸ Provinces and districts are categorised from Grade 1 (highest) to Grade 3 (lowest) based largely on population, but influenced also by political factors. Grade of the province or district will affect the allocation of resources, including the size and grades of the governor and *woleswal*’s office staff.

As water often does not reach the lower areas of Chimtāl, estimates were that 20 percent of people in those areas resort to tubewells. Shortage of water for irrigation is another reason for growing opium, as it is the only crop that can return the high cost of purchasing and maintaining a tubewell. The survey team reported that farmers in the far areas of Chimtāl have become so accustomed to poppy cultivation, that even if there was sufficient water to grow other crops – without tubewell irrigation – they would not stop. Tubewells are also relied on in Char Bolak, which lies even farther downstream along the main water sources.⁶⁹

The main crops cultivated in the two districts are wheat, barley, maize, cotton, poppy, hashish, onion, potato, *nakhod* (chickpea), sesame, flax, watermelon, melon, cucumber, tomato, okra, eggplant, cumin, apricot, almonds, grapes, peach, pomegranate, and mulberry.

Both districts had been adversely affected by the 2011 drought and the subsequent harsh winter of 2011-12, which took its toll on the livestock economy. In Chimtāl, some said that 50 percent of the winter's output had been destroyed, and that due to lack of water only about ten percent of normal summer crops were planted. Farther downstream in Char Bolak, the drought may have been even worse as most of the water has to come through Chimtāl. Some respondents in Chimtāl claimed that due to the winter of 2010-11, which had been warmer than usual, many animals had died in the 2011-12 winter because people had not prepared adequate food and shelter. Others said that it was simply that keeping animals had become very expensive due to the need to purchase fodder. Of course, people complained that the government had not helped at all with either the drought or the harsh winter. Respondents in both districts were extremely optimistic about the 2012 agricultural year and the anticipated positive effects on agriculture and livestock of the significant spring rains.

Improved security in some areas, at least for now

In both districts, security in some areas was said to have improved in 2012 relative to 2011, although in a reverse of the previous year, Char Bolak was considered to have improved relatively more than Chimtāl.⁷⁰ Within each district there are variations in security conditions and loyalties from area to area. In both districts the improvement was attributed to a combination of the introduction of *arbaki* (local security forces),⁷¹ increased activity of the government security forces (ANA and ANP), and decreased activity of the Taliban.

In Chimtāl, Arab and Hazara *arbaki* were credited with protecting the areas of Pashma Qalah, Bai Timur, Arzankar, and Uruzgani, which are near the *woleswali*. It was noted that without the *arbaki*, the Taliban “would take the *woleswali* in one day.” Jar Qalah and the area to the west is said to be dominated by the Taliban and Hezb-e Islami. Similarly, Now Shir and Shosh Paikal, west of the *woleswali*, is said to be a “centre” for Taliban and that even the district governor and other officials are said to be “completely Talib.” Opium is also said to be extensively cultivated there.

In Char Bolak, respondents noted that the ANP and the ANA had come to the area and had threatened the Taliban, but that the main reason for improved security in 2012 was because *arbaki* were present in all Tajik villages, while only the Pashtun villages of Timurak and Bist Paikan had *arbaki*. Taliban were said to be present in some number in the Char Bolak villages of Bist Paikal, Shosh Paikal, Arzankar, Timurak, Sabouskhor, and Naqiline-e Bist Paikal. Beyond these areas, Taliban were said to be everywhere. Respondents noted that the *arbaki* improved the security situation, and if they cause problems, they cause them quietly. Similarly, in Chimtāl, the *arbaki* were said to have improved their functioning (i.e., there is said to be less theft and they are not so much in league with the Taliban). The *arbaki* are said to be paid 6,000 Afs per month, and to be paid every three months.

69 See Pain, “The Spread of Opium Cultivation,” and Pain, “Let Them Eat Promises,” for a more detailed description of water issues and how they affect opium poppy cultivation.

70 For a description of the situation in 2011, see Pain, “Opium Poppy Strikes Back.”

71 *Arbaki* were originally tribal security forces indigenous to the southeastern Loya Paktia region. ALP have been deployed in Balkh Province, but over the last few years the term *arbaki* has been informally adopted to refer to just about any irregular local security forces.

Some credit for the improved security was also given to the IMF, although this varied from area to area. For instance, respondents in Chimtal described an IMF post on top of a hill in Nawshir, but claimed that its only activity involved being resupplied by helicopter, and that when it was fired on the forces left the area. On the other hand, respondents in Chimtal reported that pilotless planes (drones) had flown over the area and done surveillance on suspicious people, then returned to attack with Cobra (fighter helicopters), and ISAF and ANSF.

While respondents in both districts attributed the improved security in 2011-12 to the *arbaki*, they were somewhat ambivalent about them and their role. On the one hand, they were seen to have brought security, but on the other they were also seen to have brought thievery and killing. Events that happened during the daytime (i.e., when a man was killed in Char Bolak while bringing his wife to her relatives' house) were attributed to *arbaki* rather than Taliban, as the *arbaki* are officially sanctioned and therefore can move around during the day. As many people have long-standing issues with the *jihadi* commanders who play an important role in the *arbaki*, it is not at all surprising that they would encounter or create problems. About 50 percent of the *arbaki* were said to be connected with *jihadi* commanders. Hezb-e Islami are said to be allied with the Taliban in parts of Chimtal. As always, it is difficult to ascertain whether a security incident is a political event or a private feud. As elsewhere in Afghanistan, the area is still affected by the local *jihadi* commanders. According to very informal estimates in Chimtal, post-2001 many of the "good ones" were "DDRed"⁷² and then turned to peaceful pursuits (20 percent). Of the others (80 percent), roughly equal numbers (40 percent) went to the government and to the Taliban (40 percent). Of those who went to the government, roughly half (20 percent) joined ANA or ANP, while half (20 percent) joined the Afghan Local Police (ALP), or *arbaki*.⁷³

Respondents emphasised that while they found the current security situation more positive, they were also very wary of what the future would bring. For instance, respondents in Chimtal described the situation in Alburz as an example of complicated and dynamic relationships: About two years ago, people in Alburz became *arbaki* and the government distributed weapons to them. For one year they worked as *arbaki*, but then they became Talibs and they now oppose the government. Events such as this highlights the concerns noted above about the role of former abusive *jihadi* commanders in the *arbaki*.

Respondents in Char Bolak were even less pleased with what they described as another local security force, similar to *arbaki*, which had been formed before the winter. They were said to wear uniforms, but respondents complained that they sat in their posts and demanded food and wood.⁷⁴

Improvements on meagre development work

Limited development work has been done in Chimtal, which may contribute to the dissatisfaction with the government. The NSP has initiated work in Char Bolak, where at least one major NGO has recently opened an office. Respondents reported other recent development activities, including a public works project and a Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) programme in both districts. In Char Bolak, there are 85 Community Development Councils (CDCs) as part of the NSP. At the level of the *woleswali*, there are two *shuras*: the official District Development Assembly (DDA); and, the unofficial council of elders, or *rish-e safidan* (literally, "white beards").

In Char Bolak, it was (informally) estimated that even before the drought 30 percent of the men were in Iran seeking work, and that in 2011 "half" of the men had gone to Iran or elsewhere to find work. The rate for smuggling to Iran was reported to be \$3,000, with greater amounts for

72 Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) was the first phase of the Afghanistan New Beginnings Programme, which aimed to eliminate or reduce the number of armed men in the countryside. The programme acronym has since become a verb.

73 Percentages are informal estimates based on interviews with respondents.

74 Respondents might have been referring to members of the Critical Infrastructure Police, which were formed in 2011, and which are even less formal (and supervised) than the ALP. As noted above, the term *arbaki* has become a general term to refer to any irregular security force.

countries farther to the west. However, respondents in Char Bolak, unlike in Chimtal, noted that more development work had been done, including road graveling and paving, canal cleaning or digging, distribution of seeds and fruit saplings, and the construction of schools, a new *woleswali* centre, and a security command centre.

5.2 Badakhshan fieldwork areas

In Badakhshan, fieldwork was conducted in the two adjacent districts of Jurm and Khash (see Map 4). Both districts are located to the southeast of the provincial centre of Faizabad, Jurm at a distance of roughly 70 km and Khash a bit farther to the south at either 40 or 80 km, depending on which of the two roads are used. Jurm contains approximately 55 villages and has a population of 60,000, while Khash is composed of approximately 12 villages and has a population of 15,000.⁷⁵ Jurm's ethnic distribution is roughly similar to the rest of the province, although with a slightly higher percentage of Tajiks. The population of Khash is overwhelmingly Uzbek (90 percent), with the remaining 10 percent Tajik.

Unlike the districts surveyed in Balkh, security is considered to be relatively good in both districts surveyed in Badakhshan. Periodic instability is ascribed less to the Taliban insurgency and more to ongoing factional competition and power struggles. The lapis mines described above in Kuran-wa Munjan District, just to the south of Khash, provide employment opportunities and are an economic factor in the area.

Water and the winter

Characteristics of irrigation vary between the two districts. Roughly 70 percent of Jurm's farmland is irrigated, with the remaining 30 percent rain-fed. Irrigation is facilitated largely through canals and springs. After mid-June, when the snowmelt from the higher elevations subsides, households rely on springs, although in any case the water runs through a *jui* (canal). In Khash, on the other hand, the majority (60 percent) of agricultural land is *lalmi*. Irrigation water for the remaining land comes from springs and canals, with much coming from snow melt in the higher elevations. As elsewhere in Badakhshan and across parts of the north, the 2010-11 *lalmi* crop was very poor, although in Jurm it might not have been as bad as elsewhere; a combination of the location's high altitude and being in the shade of the mountain reduced the amount of water that evaporated. Khash is also at a high elevation (approximately 3,000 metres), so during the 2011 drought Khash received more water and therefore did not suffer as much as Jurm. Khash is also said to have good springs and land that is considered to be *khaki* (brown loamy soil) rather than *regi* (sandy), and therefore better-able to retain water.

The long, harsh 2011-12 winter was still very much present in people's minds in both districts during the time of fieldwork. Everyone noted that the snow came early and left late. Informal estimates in Jurm were that 10 percent of animals were killed by the cold or the lack of fodder. Due to the sharp increase in prices, households said that they were unable to purchase food for their animals; the price of a 50 kg bag of straw was said to have increased from 200-300 Afs to 1,300-1,600 Afs (and costing 1,600-1,700 Afs at the peak of winter). Some noted that in the past households would not even bother to purchase for 300 Afs, because during the fall people would harvest grass from the mountains for free and store it for the winter. In the fall of 2011, however, the early snow buried all of the grass so that it was inaccessible. Others mentioned that in a normal year animals would be tied up in the house during the three winter months, while during the winter of 2011-12 they had to tie them up for six months. Due to the lingering winter and late arrival of spring, animals were said to have left the Dasht-e Awdan for the Shiwa pastures one month later than usual. In Khash, informal estimates were that 15 percent of livestock died during the winter, which is slightly higher than in Jurm and in other areas, perhaps due to the higher elevation.

⁷⁵ The number of villages was taken from the Badakhshan Provincial Development Plan. Population figures are taken from CSO, "Population Estimation 2011-12."

Building on one-season farming

Important crops in the two districts include wheat, barley, maize, potato, beans, poppy, *chars*, *patak* (a sort of animal feed), *ghamu*, cumin, onions, mustard, melons, tomatoes, eggplant, okra, and cauliflower, with the exception that maize, mustard, okra, cauliflower, and melons are much less common in Khash. Fruits and nuts include walnuts, apples, apricot, mulberry, peaches, and almonds.

Most households farm their own land, with few either leasing or sharecropping. Due to the climate in Badakhshan, most land will provide yields only in one season, although in some places there is a short second season, mainly to grow animal fodder or *chars*. In Jurm, *chars* is intercropped with wheat. Typically, 20-30 days after the wheat harvest, *chars* will ripen and then be harvested. Khash's higher and colder elevation also means that the time of planting is about 20-30 days later, as is the harvest. In the higher altitudes, opium poppy is sown in the late spring, as the snow is melting and the soil is still moist. This allows for the cultivation of rain-fed poppy. While yields are low, quality is said to be high. More generally, there is cultivation only during one season. What little second season planting is done during the summer is primarily for animal feed. As in Jurm, *chars*, which is normally a summer crop, is grown with wheat and harvested 20-30 days after wheat. The price of *chars* is said to be the same as in Jurm. Since a *jalob*⁷⁶ from Warduj had been arrested and imprisoned in Faizabad three months prior, no one was available to purchase *chars*, and so many farmers decided to store their inventory. Some thought that the arrest had simply been a ruse to drive down the price.

For the last 3-4 years, Aga Khan has been the implementer of the NSP in Jurm, under which a number of small hydro-electric schemes, drinking water pipe schemes for potable water, schools, retaining walls for flood protection, small irrigation structures, and fruit tree nurseries were constructed. Some gravel roads have also been built with financial support from the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ). Similar development work had been done in Khash, with the notable addition of the road from Bagh-e Mubarak to the Khash *woleswali* (district centre). This road was said to have been arranged by Minister of Mines Shahrani, who is from Shahrani, within the district at a very high expense, although the high passes posed engineering challenges which drove up the cost. It was also said that Shahrani had established a good *madrassa* in his home area.

5.3 Household assets and livelihoods choices

As described in the methodology section, 30 farming households were surveyed in each of the provinces to obtain a range of information related to assets such as land and livestock, cultivation patterns, sale of outputs and assets, household composition, off-farm income, and perceptions of changes in and sustainability of the household's economic situation. In addition, interviews were conducted with shopkeepers and labourers to get a broader sense of the area economy. Based on collected information, household incomes were calculated.

Land ownership and access

Of the 30 farming households surveyed in each province, in Balkh 24 owned land, while in Badakhshan all 30 did. Sharecropping was a common practice among the Balkh households (18 of 30 households), but almost non-existent in Badakhshan (three households). In Balkh, one household leased land. The average size of landholdings was larger in the fieldwork areas of Badakhshan than Balkh (16.8 and 13.2 *jerib* respectively),⁷⁷ although 37 percent of holdings in Badakhshan were less-productive *lalmi* land (as opposed to the 11 percent in Balkh). Average irrigated holdings were larger in Balkh.⁷⁸ In the sampled areas of Balkh, there was no rain-fed

⁷⁶ *Jalob* refers to a trader, dealer, or middleman. The term is often used pejoratively.

⁷⁷ One *jerib* is equal to 0.494 acre or roughly one-fifth of a hectare.

⁷⁸ The analysis of size of holdings and some other calculations exclude an outlier - one household that owned 250 *jeribs* of land, which was equivalent to almost one-third of the total land in the Badakhshan

agricultural land, while in Badakhshan 38 percent of the land belonging to surveyed households was rain-fed, and around half of the households had some rain-fed land.

A number of farmers followed the practice of leaving rain-fed land fallow in alternate years; for some households, the 2010-11 year coincided with the drought. In theory, when land becomes more valuable due to a rise in output prices or other factors, it becomes more difficult to obtain and there is more competition. This hurts farmers who lease or sharecrop land because they have to agree to less favourable terms with landlords, including who provides fertiliser and other inputs. In Balkh, however, some reported that it was easier to get land while others reported that it was more difficult in the spring of 2012 due to increased abundance of water and generally better growing conditions. One landless farmer in Chimalt said that he had an agreement with a landowner the previous year to provide 20 percent of the output, but that then another farmer came and after the ensuing bidding war the original farmer was now giving the landlord 25 percent. Another smallholder in Chimalt who sharecrops additional land said that he had problems in 2012 because it was more difficult to get land, and that he had used personal connections to do so. One of the very few sharecroppers in Badakhshan noted that “many people work as labourers, so it is hard to get land. When opium is grown, it is harder to get land. For several years when poppy was reduced, land wasn’t that valuable, so it was easier to get land.”⁷⁹

However, many of the factors which affect availability and terms of land use are related to individual cases (i.e., brothers moving back from Pakistan to farm land). Many respondents who reported no change in the difficulty of getting land for sharecropping attributed this to proximity of the land, family relations, or the historical relationship with the landowner – with the landowner preferring to give the land to a known entity. As one landless farmer who sharecrops 30 *jeribs* noted, “I have been cultivating this land for ten years, so there was no problem.”⁸⁰ Others in Char Bolak noted that due to the 2011 water shortage, farmers were reluctant to take on too much land to cultivate.

As shown in Table 1 below, the average household size was a bit lower (11.2) in Badakhshan (excluding the one large household there that made up more than one-fifth of the total persons in the surveyed households) than in Balkh (12.3), although the average household dependency ratio was higher in Badakhshan (.81) than in Balkh (.68), which may simply reflect greater unemployment in the former. The average size of the fieldwork households in both areas was therefore higher than the measured national average.⁸¹

Table 1: Profile of surveyed farming households

	Number of households who:				Average land owned (jeribs)	Average farmed (jeribs)	Average HH size	Average HH dependency ratio
	Own irrigated land	Own lalmi land	Are landless	Share-crop/lease land				
Balkh	24	1	6	19	13.2	22.2	12.3	.68
Badakhshan	29	17	0	3	16.8	17.0	11.2	.80

Note: The figures in this table are derived from the 30 households surveyed in each province.

The following sections discuss characteristics of the households in the fieldwork areas, including incomes and livelihoods strategies, cropping choices, off-farm work and migration, household debt and assets, and finally some of the factors which influence the decision to grow or not to grow opium poppy.

sample. This is irrelevant for most analysis, but would skew averages and some other measures.

79 Interview with farmer, Khash.

80 Interview with farmer, Chimalt.

81 The national average household size is 7.3, and 7.2 in rural areas. Some consider this figure to be low, however. See Ministry of Economy/The World Bank, “Poverty Status in Afghanistan. A Profile Based on National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) 2007/08” (Kabul: Al-Azhar Book Co., 2010).

Household incomes

As shown in Table 2 below, household incomes, both total and per capita, were significantly higher in the Balkh fieldwork areas as compared with the Badakhshan ones. While the samples were not drawn scientifically and cannot be used to make inferences about the provinces as a whole, the lower household incomes are consistent with the lower agricultural prospects in the more remote, mountainous province of Badakhshan. This is also reinforced by the much greater percentage of household incomes that were derived from non-agricultural sources. In both fieldwork areas, the calculated average household income per capita per day was less than \$2.

Table 2: Income profile of fieldwork areas

	Avg. on-farm income 2010-11 (USD)	Avg. on-farm income 2011-12 (USD)	Avg. off-farm income 2011-12 (USD)	Avg. HH income 2011-12 (USD)	Avg. HH size	Income per-capita 2011-12 (USD)	Income per-capita per day 2011-12 (USD)	On-farm income 2011-12 (percent)	Off-farm income 2011-12 (percent)
Balkh	4,878	5,358	1,509	6,867	12.3	654	1.79	78%	22%
Badakhshan	1,610	1,797	2,840	4,638	11.2	400	1.10	39%	61%

Note: Figures exclude one household in Badakhshan that due to substantially larger asset holdings generated 41 percent of the income in the 30 sampled households.

Even with a combination of farm and off-farm incomes, many households appear to be struggling to meet their basic living requirements. For instance, in Badakhshan 26 of 30 households were getting by on \$2 per person per day, with half of the 30 households generating less than \$1 per person per day.

Table 3 offers a comparison of income per person between Balkh and Badakhshan.

Table 3: Breakdown of households by income per person per day, 2011-12

Income per person per day	Balkh (number of households)	Badakhshan (number of households)
Less than \$1	10	15
\$1 - 2	9	11
\$2 - 5	10	4
More than \$5	1	0

Farm income and cropping choices

In both areas, as was the case for all of northern Afghanistan, farming conditions in the spring of 2012 were reported to have generally improved over the previous year. The optimism expressed by farmers at the time of fieldwork was largely borne out by subsequent metrics, as most areas of the country experienced above-average precipitation during October 2011-June 2012 and the grain harvest was measured to be the second highest in the last 35 years. Households dependent on rain-fed grains were reported to have had much better harvests in 2012 than in 2011. According to the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), on the national level "both food availability and households' economic access to food have improved tremendously since last year."⁸² For northwestern Afghanistan (including Balkh), FEWS NET reported that the average for rain-fed crops in 2012 was 250 percent above the previous year.⁸³

⁸² Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), "Afghanistan Food Security Outlook: October to March 2013," http://www.fews.net/docs/Publications/Afghanistan_OL_10_2012.pdf. 2 October 2012.

⁸³ FEWS NET, "Afghanistan Food Security Outlook."

Among surveyed households in both provinces, cropping choices in 2011-12 were fairly consistent with the previous year's, with a couple of significant exceptions, notably in Badakhshan where the number of households who reported growing poppy increased from ten to 21. More generally, as shown in Table 4, the proportion of cropped land allocated to high-value crops increased over the previous year.⁸⁴

In Balkh, more households increased the amount of land sown to cotton, with respondents citing the previous year's high prices and good output as the main reasons.⁸⁵ The increase in high-value crops is attributed to the improved water availability; if there is less water, farmers will generally grow more wheat and barley. Still, some farmers mentioned that they feared a repeat of the previous year's drought, and so were reluctant to plant a crop that requires more water, while others mentioned that they were reluctant to borrow money that they would have needed to pay the additional labour required for cotton. While farmers noted that watermelon had similarly yielded high prices the previous year, the amount of land sown to watermelon had not increased, likely due to the concerns expressed by a number of farmers about watermelon flies which had previously decimated some areas.⁸⁶

In Badakhshan, the high-value crop of choice for expansion was poppy. Table 4 shows 19 households increased cultivation and 10 maintained the same level. The single household which reduced cultivation instead planted the one-half acre of land to *chars*. Of the 10 households that cultivated opium poppy in 2010-11, only one decreased the amount, while eight increased. Of the 20 households that did not cultivate opium poppy in 2010-11, eleven did cultivate in 2011-12.

Table 4: Change in cultivation of significant crops from 2010-11 to 2011-12

Crop	Balkh					Badakhshan				
	Grew at all		Grew less	Grew more	Grew same	Grew at all		Grew less	Grew more	Grew same
	2010-11	2011-12				2010-11	2011-12			
Wheat	30	29	15	7	8	30	29	10	14	6
High-value crops			7	15	8		30	6	14	10
Cotton	26	25	6	11	13	0	0	0	0	0
Opium poppy	2	2	0	0	2	10	21	1	19	10
Chars	1	0	0	1	0	15	11	12	4	14
Fodder crops	1	1	0	0	1	5	6	2	2	26

Note: For the purpose of analysis, "high value crops" include oil crops (flax, etc.), melons, watermelons, cotton, orchards, pulses, poppy, chars, potato, and other vegetables. Some of these crops are grown partly for household use (e.g., vegetables), but the bulk are grown for the market to generate cash income. Fodder crops include alfalfa, shaftal, rishqa, and patak. These are grown primarily to feed households' own livestock, but are sometimes sold in the market.

Table 5 presents the percentage of total area sown to various significant crops in 2010-11 and 2011-12, showing that the percentage of total land sown to poppy increased from four to ten percent in the Badakhshan households.

84 When asked directly whether they had grown more "high-value" crops this year than last, 12 in Balkh and 29 in Badakhshan reported having done so. It is possible that some respondents may have interpreted "high-value" crop to refer only to opium poppy.

85 As noted above, the 2011 drought affected mainly the *lalmi* (rain-fed) areas.

86 This is believed to be the Baluchistan melon fly (*Bactrocera cucurbitae*), for which there is at present no easy cure.

Table 5: Percentage of total farmed area sown to significant crops, 2010-11 and 2011-12

Crop	Balkh		Badakhshan	
	2010-11 (percent)	2011-12 (percent)	2010-11 (percent)	2011-12 (percent)
Wheat	50	44	70	73
High-value crops of which:	43	47	18	21
Cotton	21	24	-	-
Opium poppy	1	1	4	10
Chars	< 1	0	5	3
Fodder crops			4	2

In Balkh, decent roads and flat terrain create easy access to the city of Mazar and to a lesser extent to the Balkh district centre, thereby giving farmers more options to sell their output. While traders do circulate and buy higher value crops at the village or at the farm gate, many respondents said that they preferred to take their outputs to Mazar, as they were able to obtain better prices there. Some took their outputs (cotton) to the center of Balkh District, as there is no tax on the road to Balkh. For lower value crops (e.g., flax), however, traders did not come to the villages, and so households typically took it to Mazar. In Balkh, respondents universally noted that there were no security or other constraints on bringing outputs to markets, and that other than the usual legal taxes at the *bandar*,⁸⁷ there was no illegal extraction.

In Badakhshan, with mountainous terrain and poor transport infrastructure, farmers relied much more on *jalo*s for the sale of opium and *chars*, as well as other licit crops and livestock. Similar to Balkh, *jalo*s would not expend much effort for low-value crops such as potatoes, and so farmers were compelled to bring them to Faizabad or the other market towns themselves. Some respondents noted that this lack of access to markets put a ceiling on the amount of land that could be given to such crops. In Badakhshan, all respondents said that there were no illegal checkpoints or constraints on taking licit goods to market (other than distance and inferior roads), but that transporting opium was problematic due to the possibility of theft or being asked for bribes, and so *jalo*s purchased it at the farm gate.

As most households in Afghanistan are understood to prioritise food security,⁸⁸ calculations were made of the extent to which households were able to meet their wheat needs from their own production. Essentially all households in both areas grew some wheat (see Table 3 above). As shown in Table 6, according to the calculations, in 2010-11 in Balkh 22 of 30 households had a wheat surplus from their own production, while in Badakhshan only eight of 30 did. While average landholdings were slightly larger in Badakhshan, the smaller number of households able to meet their own grain requirements from their own production reflects the fact that a higher proportion of land in Badakhshan was rain-fed rather than irrigated, and which therefore produces lower yields. It should be noted that in Balkh the surveyed villages farmed irrigated land almost entirely and also were located relatively upstream, which meant that they were not as badly affected by the 2011 drought as other villages in the two districts (and the north more broadly) which were dependent on rainfall or were located farther downstream with less water.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Literally meaning border or port, but also refers to a road entry or exit point to or from a city.

⁸⁸ See Mansfield, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place."

⁸⁹ Because fieldwork was done before the harvest was completed, calculations for 2012 are based on 2012 yields. See methodology for further information. More favourable agronomic conditions in 2011-12 should have produced improved yields which would in turn lead to improved food security. FEWS NET reports that in 2012 import requirements for wheat and wheat flour were 60 percent below the five-year average. FEWS NET, "Afghanistan Food Security Outlook"; Mansfield, "Governance, Security and Economic Growth," has pointed out that part of household planting decisions on wheat incorporate the value of wheat straw, which is fed to animals.

Table 6: Household wheat production surplus and deficit

Province	Grew in 2010-11	Grew in 2011-12	2010-11		2011-12	
			Surplus	Deficit	Surplus	Deficit
Balkh	30	29	22	8	20	10
Badakhshan	30	30	8	22	7	23

Animal husbandry

The importance of animal husbandry in the rural economy is reflected in the fact that in both fieldwork areas all households except one owned at least one animal. Cows were the most commonly owned animal in both areas (mainly as a source of milk for the household and sometimes for selling in the bazaar), but the types and numbers of other animals reflect the differences in the agricultural economies in the two areas (see Table 7). The large percentage of households in Badakhshan that owned oxen reflects the reliance on oxen as a draught animal in the mountainous province, whereas households in Balkh relied mainly on tractors, which are largely rented from the market on an hourly basis. Similarly, that all but two households in Badakhshan owned at least one donkey reflects the reliance on the donkey as a means of transport in the mountainous area where roads and motor transport networks are less developed. Finally, the proportion of households that owned sheep and the average herd size in Badakhshan reflects the importance of animal husbandry in the rural economy. As noted above, due to the high cost of fodder it is almost impossible for sedentary households to own animals without land on which to graze them. The much higher average number of sheep owned by households in the fieldwork areas of Badakhshan was despite the large numbers of animals which died or were sold off during the 2011-12 harsh winter. The loss of animal assets and its effect on livelihoods is discussed below.

Table 7: Household ownership of animals

Province	Cows			Oxen			Sheep			Goats			Donkeys		
	Yes	No	Avg.	Yes	No	Avg.	Yes	No	Avg.	Yes	No	Avg.	Yes	No	Avg.
Balkh	27	3	2.1	5	25	0.3	17	13	4.7	21	9	4.9	20	10	0.9
Badakhshan	29	1	2.3	23	7	1.3	27	3	15.3	4	26	.8	28	2	1.5

Note: Averages only (not frequencies) exclude one animal trading household in Badakhshan that owned substantially larger numbers of animals.

Off-farm work and migration: Today and the “good old days”

As noted in Table 2 above, income earned off-farm contributed a significant part to household livelihoods. On average, households in Badakhshan relied more on off-farm income than those in Balkh. According to calculations, without the contribution of off-farm incomes, none of the 30 households in Badakhshan would have been able to meet the threshold of a minimum income of \$2 per person per day and only seven would have achieved the \$1 per person per day threshold. Migration to other areas of the province, Kabul, or Iran is a key part of livelihoods strategies. In Balkh, 17 of 30 households reported at least one person working full-time off-farm, while in Badakhshan 20 of 30 households reported the same. In Balkh, six households reported that a member was currently working in Iran, while in Badakhshan four households did so. A number of households explicitly reported part-time off-farm work (eight in Balkh, five in Badakhshan), but given the episodic and intermittent nature of farming as well as the often-flexible nature of “full-time” jobs, the distinction between full-time and part-time employment may not be meaningful.

In Balkh, the proximity of Mazar city and the strength of its economy provide opportunities for labour and other off-farm employment. Even from the most distant parts of Char Bolak and Chimal, travel to Mazar took no more than two hours, whereas parts of Jurm required more than six hours to reach Faizabad. A number of the casual labourers interviewed in Mazar reported that they owned land and that they travelled to Mazar to seek daily wage work when free from farm work. Labour opportunities therefore provide a “safety valve” in Balkh. Among the labourers

interviewed were some who had land but had not planted any crops in 2011 because of the drought, and some without any land who had sharecropped land but had been forced to take a loan when they did not get any output.

All agreed that labour opportunities in Balkh, especially in Mazar, were much more plentiful in 2012 than the previous year, when the drought released people from agriculture and drove them into the cities and towns, which put downward pressure on the daily labour wage. Wages in 2012 were said to be higher than the previous year, as due to the good rains people were busy with agriculture. Most reported being able to find work just about when they wanted it. (One unskilled labourer reported that he had worked 10 straight days since arriving from his village.) Some reported that part of the current demand for labour resulted from the previous year's leftover construction work having been shut down longer than usual due to the long and harsh winter.⁹⁰ Those who had networks and acquaintances, especially among the masons and *tekadars* (contractors), were better placed to find work.⁹¹ Only one of 16 labourers interviewed in Mazar complained about the lack of work, and drew a negative comparison with Jalalabad, where he had migrated over the winter. He ascribed his precarious situation to his lack of a network in Mazar; also, because his village (Shirabad) was far from the city he arrived too late each day to obtain work or else incurred lodging expenses. He also claimed that wages are the same as in the past but that prices have risen.

In fact, reported wages in 2012 were higher, although it is not clear whether they kept pace with prices. According to the WFP, prices for both wheat and wheat flour have been decreasing since 2011 in both Mazar and Faizabad – as they have been in most urban areas of the country – which is attributed to the resumption of more normal exports from significant exporting countries and the prospects of a good harvest in Afghanistan in 2012, although prices are still significantly higher than the level before the major spike in 2007.⁹² Overall inflation since the previous year appeared to be modest in Mazar (5.6 percent) and virtually non-existent in Faizabad (less than one percent).⁹³ The WFP also notes that the terms of trade between casual daily labour wages and wheat has increased since May 2011 by 14 percent in Mazar and 29 percent in Faizabad.⁹⁴ One labourer reported that he had moved with his family from Kabul to Mazar because rent and other costs were too high. In Mazar, he was able to stay with his in-laws in joint housing, which reduced costs as well as solved the issue of not having a *sarparast*⁹⁵ in the home.

The higher wages in Mazar relative to the villages drew labourers into the city. For instance, a number of labourers said that if they could find work in the village it would pay 200-250 Afs per day (usually with food), while in Mazar where there was more work they would get 300-400 Afs (without food). At the time of fieldwork, wages were reported to be in the range of 300-400 Afs, much increased from the previous year's 200-250 Afs due to the lack of work on farms brought on by the drought. Skilled labourers, especially masons, reported being able to earn as much as 700-800 Afs per day, up from 500-600 Afs the previous year. Masons were also able to take on even more profitable *teka* (piece) work in which they would hire and supervise labourers. Some in Mazar reported earning as much as 500 Afs per day according to *kotara*,⁹⁶ a system for piecework which was often used for digging ditches or building walls accounted by the metre. One labourer

90 FEWS NET offered insight as to the reportedly higher demand for labour and wages at the national level; "high demand for agricultural labour during the main May-August harvest brought higher than normal daily labour wages for poor households and landless households." FEWS NET, "Afghanistan Food Security Outlook."

91 For a comparison with 2010-2011 year when labour opportunities were more limited, see Pain, "Opium Poppy Strikes Bank."

92 WFP/VAM, "Afghanistan Market Price Bulletin."

93 Da Afghanistan Bank, "National Consumer Price Index by Provinces" (Kabul: Da Afghanistan Bank, 2012).

94 Figured based on the Afghanistan Market Price Bulletin (see WFP/VAM, "Afghanistan Market Price Bulletin"). Terms of trade indicate how much of one "product" can be exchanged for another, in this case labour for wheat. An increase in the terms of trade means that a day's work will gain a labourer more wheat.

95 *Sarparast* literally means "supervisor" or "guardian," and in this context refers to the need to have a competent male family member at home to represent and defend the interests of the family, especially the females, due in large part to the tradition of seclusion and lack of mobility.

96 From Uzbeki.

reported that the per metre remuneration was higher in places (e.g., Dehdadi) where there was gravel below the surface.

There are a range of arrangements, with the relative attractiveness determined by the calculus of family responsibilities and the arithmetic of transport and lodging costs. Some commute daily, some spend 4-5 days in town and return on weekends, while others rent casual apartments in town. Labourers who don't have relatives with whom they can stay often obtain lodging in a group setting at a *chai khana* (tea house). Typically, they will pay 70-80 Afs for food, which includes simple lodging (a cotton mattress and a place on the floor or on a wooden platform at no extra charge). The owner of the *chai khana* benefits from being able to sell food at night, and additional costs of providing lodging are minimal.

A few labourers reported seasonal migration (e.g., Jalalabad during the winter, Kabul during the summer) where employment was more plentiful. Some labourers might prefer to go to Iran to work, but are unable to do so because of family obligations or lack of a *sarparast*. Some of those who had previously spent time in Iran reported bringing back savings which then went to paying for family weddings or paying off previous debts. While most labourers who had spent time in Iran reported being paid reasonably well, they also described life there as difficult due to their inability to deal with issues at home but also because they were blamed for taking away jobs or driving down wages.⁹⁷ In Balkh, respondents said that they generally do not go to the south of Afghanistan for the opium harvest because of bad relations along ethnic lines dating most immediately to the *mawqawmat* (1996-2001 period of resistance to Taliban), but also extending back longer to ethnic divides from the early 1900s when Pashtun settlers from the south were given land in the north. The insecurity in the south and the fact that the work is of short duration also makes it less conducive for labour migration. Finally, even among many Pashtuns, Helmand is considered somewhat *washi* (wild, uncivilised).

A number of labourers in Mazar wistfully described the differences from the years of opium cultivation. According to one (Uzbek) mason from Shirabad:

*This past winter I went to Jalalabad for work. There was constant work, and I wasn't unemployed at all. I came back 50 days ago. There isn't so much work here. Wages are the same as in the past, while prices have gone up. This year to some extent is better than last. But, three [sic] years ago was very good. There was lots of trade, there was opium cultivation.*⁹⁸

Another (Tajik) from near Kod-e Barq said that he used to work harvesting opium, and that the work of labourers and farmers was good – no one was unemployed – but that when opium was banned the livelihoods of the people had contracted. Another labourer, who used to grow poppy on at least part of his six *jeribs* of land (“good output, not much effort – money was all coming in at one time”), noted that landowners do not need farmers in the same way as they used to. He explained, “for opium, one farmer could do only 2-3 *jeribs*. Now, with wheat or cotton, one farmer can do 20 *jeribs*. This means less labour, which is not so good for labourers.”⁹⁹ Finally, one (Pashtun) labourer from Chimtal reported that he had come to Mazar to seek work only because eradication and hail had destroyed the poppy crop.¹⁰⁰ Otherwise, he said he would have worked on the opium harvest in Chimtal.

One daily labourer in Mazar who had minimal land (two *jerib*) and who had migrated to Iran several years ago said that he could join the *arbaki* in his village, but that he declined because it was “not good work” and would eventually create enmity in the area. He noted

97 See Alessandro Monsutti, “Afghanistan Transnational Networks: Looking beyond repatriation” (Kabul: AREU, 2006); In addition, on the national level there have been reports of continued tightening of restrictions on Afghan migrants, as well as reduced remittances due to the depreciation of the Iranian rial and the contraction of the Iranian economy due to various factors, including western sanctions.

98 Interview with daily labourer, Mazar-e Sharif.

99 Interview with daily labourer, Mazar-e Sharif.

100 The subject of 2012 eradication in Balkh is a bit opaque. Whether or not there was poppy crop in Chimtal to eradicate is discussed below.

that his area was 80 percent Pashtun, but that most of the *arbaki* were Arab, which had the potential to create conflict.

As noted above, in Badakhshan, households' reliance on off-farm income was significantly greater, although opportunities for off-farm labour are much more limited in general, and during the fieldwork period respondents were much less optimistic about finding work locally due to the long winter. The summer construction season is much shorter in Badakhshan, and during the fieldwork all reported that due to the harsh and protracted winter off-farm work opportunities were much less plentiful in 2012 than the previous year. As construction, repair, and painting take place after the winter, when walls and materials have dried out, the lingering winter at least delayed the start of the construction season. A very typical comment was,

*Last year my life was good because winter ended early and work was available. This year there is not much work, because there is a lot of rain - winter has been very protracted. People who have money and organised work have not started yet. Last year there was work for the labourers, although bad news for the farmers; this year it is the reverse.*¹⁰¹

A qualified painter gave a sense of the scale of the problem, noting that "good technical painters in Faizabad are very scarce. In the past, 20-30 days in advance people were asking me to paint, but this year I have to look for work and even then I can't find it. Before I had so much work I had to give it to others."¹⁰²

While this may simply indicate that the work season would start later than usual, and not that it will not be as robust as in previous years, workers will have lost one to two months of wage opportunities regardless. Furthermore, workers were concerned that 2012 would also be a short year for construction, especially if the snow were to come as early as it did in the fall of 2011. All 13 of the labourers interviewed reported not being able to find work as many days as they had sought, typically finding work for only three to four days per week.¹⁰³ Aside from the late-starting season, other labourers mentioned that they typically could not find work more than seven months during a year.

As elsewhere, off-farm labour opportunities were of various types: daily casual labour, contracts, and per-metre (i.e., payment for walls or ditches on a per-metre basis). For skilled masons, daily casual is the least preferred option. Wages were in the range of 200-300 Afs, with food provided at the lower rate but not at the higher end. Labourers acknowledged that the going wage rate had increased from the previous year, but that was irrelevant if there was no work. As one noted, "at this time last year, work was plentiful, and had started one month previously. I had plenty of work. Last year the wage was 200 Afs. Now it is 250-300 Afs, but there is no work."¹⁰⁴ Skilled masons were able to attract wages of 600-700 Afs, with food, while experienced workers in the lapis mines received 300-500 Afs per day, with new workers receiving 200-300 Afs.

As daily commuting is not possible from Jurm or Khash, labourers try to stay with relatives in Faizabad to avoid expending wages on lodging.

A number of labourers noted that they had been forced to take loans due to a combination of weather-related shocks: failure of crops during 2011; destruction of houses and agricultural land by floods during the spring; or, to purchase feed for their animals during the winter. The case of a labourer from Arghanj is illustrative of the complexity of many households' livelihoods and of the view of how suppression of opium poppy cultivation has negatively affected lives (see Box 1).¹⁰⁵

101 Interview with casual labourer, Faizabad.

102 Interview with painter, Faizabad.

103 The local tradition is to work seven days per week.

104 Interview with casual labourer, Faizabad.

105 Four of 11 labourers interviewed explicitly mentioned the negative effects of the economy of the suppression of cultivation.

Box 1: Case study of labourer from Arghanj District, about 18 years old, single

Last year I was working in my own village and near to Baharak. This year, the winter was long and there was no work there. About 15 days ago, my house, land, and orchards, along with three other houses were ruined by floods. My house had eight rooms and one mehman khana (guest room). I have a garden of about one-half jerib, and grow about four jerib of wheat. This is for the 16 people in the household. I studied until eighth class, but left school because I wasn't able to learn anything. I was lazy and wasn't learning anything. Also, school was very far away, and I had to leave before 5 a.m. (before breakfast) to get there. Three years ago I left school and I have been doing labour work. This year there is no work: rain, long winter, economic situation of people is worse, buildings have been half finished - people don't have the capital to finish them. Before, when they were growing poppy, people were coming to Faizabad and buying land and were building markets and apartments. Now that poppy has been banned and people don't have money, this work has been left nim-kala [half-finished, half-assed]. Now people have the desire to grow opium, and in most areas it has already been planted. Due to the lack of attention from the government, poverty, and unemployment, people are thinking about growing. I have two cows, ten sheep, and two donkeys. One cow and three sheep were buried under the mud during the floods. I went into debt for 30,000 Afs because we had to move to another village. In previous years I was not in debt. Before my life was good, but this year it has gotten worse.

Most of the labourers had previously migrated elsewhere to seek work, including to Kabul and Iran, and reported good remuneration and availability of work. Migration to Kabul often takes place after the local wheat harvest. Most – although not all – who had returned from Iran were displeased with the way they and other Afghans had been treated there. Some told tales which were quite implausible, but which reflected the reluctance of many to migrate to what is perceived as a hostile and dangerous environment. Limits were put on migration by family issues, as noted in Balkh, but a number of respondents also mentioned that they were unable to go far because of their animal husbandry responsibilities.

As in Balkh, many respondents talked about the “good old days” of opium poppy.¹⁰⁶ Aside from labourers, shopkeepers also noted the multiplier effect that opium had had on the local economy and the deflationary effect now that it had been reduced. For example, a butcher in Jurm bazaar commented on the twin problems of the long, harsh winter and the reduction in the opium economy, noting that:

This year, due to the harsh winter, animals were thin - no meat on their bones. And people were selling out of necessity. This year I am not making much profit because I am paying money for bones rather than meat. Right now, my shop-keeping is not doing so well. In the past, in the time of opium, I was killing five to six animals per day, as everyone was eating more meat. Even they were giving to the workers. Labourers are not coming to buy meat because they don't have money. Opium had many benefits – it was kar khana (factory, place of employment) for the poor and for everyone.¹⁰⁷

Similarly, the manager of a local hotel/restaurant noted that “in the past, there were 20-50 guests each night. Now, at most I don't have ten guests... Opium was being grown and so people had more money. At that time, people who were living nearby were coming just for *showqi* (pleasure) from their homes. Also, opium traders were staying at the hotel.”¹⁰⁸ The case of a shopkeeper/food seller from Jurm was also representative of the experience of many (see Box 2).

¹⁰⁶ Pain notes that households described the period of essentially unrestrained cultivation as the “festival” years due to the positive effect that it had on livelihoods and general welfare. See Pain, “Opium Poppy Strikes Back.”

¹⁰⁷ Interview with butcher, Jurm Bazaar.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with hotel manager, Jurm Bazaar.

Box 2: Case study of shopkeeper/food seller from Jurm Bazaar

In the time of opium, two to three years ago, I was bringing products from Mazar every ten days, and we had two people working in the shop. Now, I need to go only every 40 days. At that time, men and women, small and large, were carrying around opium and using it to buy household goods. There were days that I was making 5,000 Afs profit. People had money and a store of opium; in winter, they would use it to purchase goods. If they were in debt, they would resolve with either cash or "goods." There was also work for people without land or with limited land. There was work for women, girls, children, old women. People weren't going to Pakistan to find work. This past winter, I gave out two lakh (200,000) in goods [in credit]. And my total capital is four lakh. These days when I go to Mazar to buy goods, I use credit, adjusting it each time. I have two lakh in debt to various traders and wholesalers in Mazar. In the good days, I would pay cash for goods and not go into debt.

One labourer said that he was hoping that his life would improve when the opium harvesting season started.

Household debt and sales of assets

That a greater number of households incurred debt in 2012 than in 2011, especially in Badakhshan, is consistent with the drought and harsh winter.

Table 8: Households incurring debt

	2011-12		2010-11		Both Years
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Balkh	15	15	9	21	5
Badakhshan	14	16	4	26	2

As shown in Table 8, in Badakhshan, only four households reported incurring debt in 2010-11, while 14 of 30 did in 2011-12.¹⁰⁹ In 2011-12, of the 16 households surveyed in Badakhshan who reported incurring loans, ten said that it was at least partly due to the need to purchase animal food, one of the most common fallouts from the winter. The generally preferred source of loans was relatives, in part because this may limit public shame and there is no question of interest. The most common source of credit, however, was shopkeepers, who often provided loans in kind (e.g., food, household essentials). In many cases, these are informal arrangements that are part of normal social relationships, and virtually all respondents vigorously emphasised that there was no interest involved, although a small number of households specified that they had borrowed money with interest from moneylenders or NGOs.¹¹⁰

More than half of the households surveyed in Badakhshan reported selling assets during the preceding 12 months (see Table 9 below). Four households specified that these were not distress sales (although at least one was motivated by the high cost of animal feed), while the rest attributed it to the harsh winter and the need to purchase animal feed, care for a household

¹⁰⁹ This does not include two households which took lapis or large numbers of animals as working capital.

¹¹⁰ A number of respondents put NGO projects and moneylenders into the same *sudh*-giving category, whereas most respondents had arranged loans without any interest (*qarz-e hasana*), which could be repaid either in cash or in-kind, and which were often described in rather vague terms. Associations between NGO microfinance programmes and un-Islamic *sudh* are fairly widespread. For instance, see Paula Kantor, "From Access to Impact: Microcredit and Rural Livelihoods in Afghanistan" (Kabul: AREU, 2009). For more information on the role of shopkeepers in providing credit, see Erna Andersen, "Reciprocity and Participation: Microcredit and Informal Credits in Rural Afghanistan," in *Local Politics in Afghanistan: A Century of Intervention in Social Order*, ed. Conrad Schetter (London: Hurst and Company, 2010).

illness, or pay for general household expenses. At least two households in Balkh reported having sold animals in order to acquire other productive assets such as a vehicle or tractor, which seems to be more of an investment than a distress sale. Fifteen households in Badakhshan reported selling off inventories of opium or *chars*, some of which may have been held from previous years.

In the Badakhshan fieldwork areas, ten households reported that they had sold opium in the last year, with another four reporting sales of *chars*. Three of these households reported selling both. An additional five households reported that they would have sold their *chars*, but that the price was too low so they had decided to store it for future sale.

Table 9: Households selling off animals and other assets in preceding 12 months

	Sold Assets		Type of Asset	
	Yes	No	Animal	Other
Balkh	7	22	6	2
Badakhshan	18	11	18	2

Note: Totals for type of asset exceed number of households selling assets because some households sold both animal and other assets. Badakhshan households exclude one animal trader, for whom selling animals is a routine occurrence.

5.4 To grow or not to grow

Surveyed households in the two provinces confronted vastly different physical, economic, and political environments. The themes that emerged from the analysis differed somewhat in each province. In Balkh, analysis primarily confirmed the role of state presence and coercion in suppressing cultivation, the correlation of opium poppy cultivation with insecurity, and questions about the methodology and process used in determining cultivated area. In Badakhshan, the themes that emerged were the economic damage wrought by the protracted harsh winter which led to the incurring of debt, the lack of credible threat of eradication which would discourage households from planting opium poppy, and, the lack of adequate government support to help with livelihoods or compensation for giving up poppy cultivation. In both areas, respondents cited the lack of development assistance, both relative to the south of the country and to the promises that had been made, although it is not clear whether this would be a reason or a justification. This is a recurrent theme reported by other research in northern Afghanistan.¹¹¹ Both provinces raise, albeit in different ways, questions about coercive approaches and under what conditions they can productively be applied.

Balkh

While Balkh retained its official “poppy-free” status in 2012, it appears that the province was not as “poppy-free” as previously.¹¹² While some would say that this is similar to being “a little bit pregnant,” others would say that this underlines the lack of utility in using a binary measure to evaluate progress in sustainable reductions in poppy cultivation, and in addition raises questions about the metrics. The cultivation of poppy in Balkh is ascribed to insecurity and the lack of government investment in the growing areas, which tend to be more remote and insecure.

Due to the political commitment to maintaining a “poppy free” Balkh, households cannot cultivate in areas where the government has an ongoing presence. In the parts of Char Bolak

111 Fishstein, “Winning Hearts and Minds? (Balkh)”; Geert Gompelman, “Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan’s Faryab Province” (Medford, MA: Tufts University Feinstein International Center, 2011); Adam Pain also noted the awareness that poppy continued to be cultivated in the south of the country, especially among men who had served in the south with the ANSF – motivated by the lack of livelihoods as a consequence of the suppression of poppy cultivation in their home areas. (See Pain, “Opium Poppy Strikes Back”).

112 As noted above, the US government’s figures estimate that 640 ha were cultivated. In addition, a memo prepared by a USAID staff suggests that, based on monitoring in Chimal, the rigorous definition of “poppy-free” may not have been met.

which are close to the road and in which, due to the deployment of the *arbaki*, there is less of a Taliban presence, security is better than it was previously, so farmers cannot grow there. One non-Pashtun daily labourer in Mazar who had two *jeribs* of land in Char Bolak said that he used to grow three years ago, but now that the government is stronger he will not do so. As a household respondent in Chimtal mentioned, "I was afraid to grow poppy, because last year there was a [eradication] campaign, and I'm a poor person and couldn't get myself free if I got in trouble. My neighbours grew, but I was afraid. In peaceful places, there is no opium. The police come and go, so there is no opium."¹¹³

On the other hand, there were reports of cultivation in the insecure areas of the two districts. In Chimtal, opium poppy is said to be concentrated mainly in the west part of the district, in the more insecure areas. According to respondents interviewed by the survey team, up to 40 percent¹¹⁴ of households in the west cultivate poppy. In Jar Qalah, respondents said that during 2010-11 there was minimal cultivation, although it had increased in 2011-12. According to a very informal estimate based on the household interviews, the percentage of households who cultivated increased from 20 to 40 percent. The role of the *arbaki* is also unclear. While their deployment was credited with mostly improving security, there were also accusations that some were themselves involved in cultivation. As one observer noted, "they do security. Poppy eradication is not in their job description."¹¹⁵

In Balkh, whatever poppy is being grown is only in areas which are insecure and where the government cannot reach. Yet, the fact that in the early years of the ban there was even more limited cultivation in Char Bolak and Chimtal districts raises a question about which direction causality flows. The standard narrative is that cultivation has followed insecurity, but the reverse may also be true. Research done the year after Balkh became "poppy-free" notes increased insecurity in these two areas, and attributed it in great part to the stresses which were put on livelihoods due to the suppression of cultivation.¹¹⁶

Although the cultivation of *chars* is also officially banned, the environment for *chars* was considered to be much more permissive. In Char Bolak, respondents said that *chars* was being grown in Jar Qalah and to the west, a largely no-go area for the government. In Arzankar, respondents said that farmers were not growing opium, although they were growing *chars*. Similarly, they were said to be growing *chars* in Yangi Qala, which is away from the road. The perception was that the government was not so serious about suppressing *chars*, and that while they would confiscate a large quantity if they found it moving on the road, they would not pursue eradication of the crop in the field. A respondent from Char Bolak interviewed in Mazar reported that there was "lots" of *chars* in both Chimtal and Char Bolak, and that there was not much change from the previous year. He confirmed that there had been no government campaign against *chars*.

As in most other areas of poppy cultivation, in Chimtal the population reported creative and often communal ways to avoid eradication. In one village, the people collected 500 Afs per *jerib* for payment to government officials to skip those fields.

Another factor is that at the far end of Chimtal there is insufficient water for other crops, although it is sufficient for poppy. In areas with insufficient water, farmers can use tubewells, but only poppy can generate sufficient returns to recoup the running costs.¹¹⁷

Another source of encouragement (or rationale) for cultivating opium poppy and *chars* in the insecure areas is the sense of grievance at the lack of government investment and the

113 Interview with farmer, Chimtal.

114 Percentages provided by respondents are highly informal and should be considered indicative or ordinal-level only.

115 Interview with NGO security personnel.

116 See Pain, "Let Them Eat Promises."

117 The survey teams were not able to visit those areas of Chimtal during the course of fieldwork, but these factors were noted in previous years. For more on this, see Pain, "Spread of Opium Cultivation"; Pain, "Let Them Eat Promises."

government's failure to deliver promised aid. Respondents said that if the government is not going to make sincere efforts to create jobs and support livelihoods, they would grow poppy. It should be noted that this sentiment is also expressed in the secure areas, although not acted upon. The dominant narrative is about progressive alienation from the government due to corruption, lack of development, etc. (These issues have been extensively documented elsewhere, both in the context of opium poppy cultivation and more broadly in terms of the population's relationship with the government.¹¹⁸) Ethnic issues also appear to play a role. These were said to have been exacerbated during Dostum's time, and respondents said that they had to turn to the Taliban for defence, lest they be victimised by the local majority Uzbeks.¹¹⁹ There are also ethnically-edged resentments of the way benefits have been distributed under the present administration.

Given the political sensitivity, it is not surprising that the status of eradication in Balkh has been somewhat murky. Even though a province may qualify as "poppy free" with up to 100 ha, officially Balkh did not do any eradication at all, which means that the Ministry of Counter Narcotics (MCN) and UNODC are not officially in the picture and therefore do not include the province in its report on eradication.¹²⁰ Whatever poppy is being grown in the insecure and off-limits areas is difficult to independently verify. Respondents said that there had been no eradication in 2010-11, but that in 2011-12 an eradication team had been sent to Now Shir in Chimtal just after Nawroz (the Afghan new year occurring on 21 March) about 15 days prior to fieldwork, but had returned after an improvised explosive device (IED) exploded amongst the poppy, injuring several members of the team. Subsequently, no eradication teams went to the area. No other information was available on any eradication that might have taken place. Respondents in Mazar said that there had been a public awareness campaign and that during the regular Monday general meeting with the *woleswals*, Governor Atta had instructed them to take action. One respondent from Char Bolak noted that the *woleswals* had gathered the village representatives and had passed on the Governor's message, but that nothing further had happened.

Badakhshan

According to UNODC figures, cultivation in Badakhshan increased in 2011-12, raising the province from "low" to "moderate" levels of cultivation. Within Jurm, opium poppy is grown in Darra-e Khostak, Fargha Miro, Kib, Askan, Farghaminj, and Chungha. Darra-e Khostak was also said to have been the location for a number of the processing factories. While those have been eliminated, there is now said to be small household-level processing. As described above, households which produce opium or *chars* rely on *jalobs* to purchase the outputs, eliminating the need to travel and sell. The recent arrest and imprisonment of a *jalob* had resulted in lower prices for *chars* and led to some farmer's decision to retain their inventory for future sale, but also raised suspicions that the arrest had been arranged to manipulate prices.

Interviews in the surveyed areas were consistent with increased cultivation across the province. As described above, opium poppy cultivation had increased over the previous year among the 30 households in the two areas of fieldwork. The number of households which grew any poppy at all doubled from 10 to 21, and eight of the ten households who cultivated in 2010-11 increased the amount of land devoted to poppy. As a result, the percentage of area sown to poppy increased from four to ten percent of total sown area (see Tables 3 and 4). Respondents said that the increase between 2011 and 2012 in cultivation in Khash was greater than between 2010 and 2011. Surveyed households described the decision to plant opium poppy as being largely due to a combination of factors: financial stress brought on by the harsh winter; scepticism about the extent to which the government would really eradicate; and, dissatisfaction with the government for not having done enough to help households make the transition from poppy to licit crops.

118 Fishstein, "Winning Hearts and Minds? (Balkh)"; Gompelman, "Winning Hearts and Minds? (Faryab)."

119 As expressed in interviews with area residents. As an additional example of related ethnic dynamic in a more institutionalised setting, the Afghan-Turk High School in Mazar annually sends 100-150 students to Turkey. Complaints were voiced that most who were given the opportunity to travel were Uzbeks, few were Tajiks, and none were Pashtuns.

120 MCN/UNODC, "Afghanistan Poppy Eradication Verification."

As noted above and in Table 8, in Badakhshan 16 of 30 households incurred debt in 2012, primarily due to the harsh winter, and in some cases augmented by other shocks. A number of these households described opium poppy as the way out of that debt, as one smallholder explained:

I originally took a loan to pay for my son's trip to Iran [to seek work]. This past winter I had to buy straw for the animals because the winter was very cold and long. I wanted to pay off the loans with the money that my son had sent from Iran, but couldn't because I had to buy straw for the animals. The winter was long, and I spent all of the money that my son had sent. All of the animals died anyway. Each animal was worth 8,000-10,000 Afs. I didn't grow poppy last year because I was afraid that the authorities would destroy it, as I live close to the woleswali. This year I am also scared, but I decided to grow anyway.¹²¹

A similar situation was related by another smallholder in the same district who had refrained the previous year but this year had given up onion and potato for poppy:

I went into debt this year. During the long winter, I had to pay for animal feed. I sold one cow because I needed the money, but it wasn't enough, so I had to take a loan. I would have sold the other cow, but it was too thin and the price was very low. The cow was eating twice what it was producing in economic value. Winter is usually three months, but this year it was eight months. My brother died and his five children and his wife became my responsibility. I didn't have enough land, so had to borrow to cover all of the costs. Last year I didn't grow opium because of fear of the authorities. I wouldn't have been in debt if I had grown. I could have sent my young son to harvest it, and he could have earned his keep that way.¹²²

Respondents also noted that opium provides a store of value which one can hold onto until the price is right or draw down in times of need, an observation that was particularly salient in the aftermath of the harshest winter in memory of 2011-12, during which livestock died for lack of fodder.¹²³ Households were said to be holding *chars* in their homes because the price had fallen from 3,500 Afs to 1,200 Afs due to the arrest of the *jalob*.

Whatever the reason for originally incurring debt may have been, respondents in Badakhshan associated cultivating poppy with the ability to liquidate those debts. For instance, all nine of the households who had both incurred debt in the current year and were growing poppy explicitly mentioned poppy as a positive factor which would allow them to pay off their debts. A typical comment was that "if they leave my opium alone, then I can pay off my loans.... If opium holds, it is gold. It will provide expenses for two more years."¹²⁴ Or,

If the government destroys the crop, then it is God's will, and everyone else is in the same situation together. If the crop is left for harvest, then I can pay off my loans. One gets the same return from one section of opium as from five sections of wheat. Last year eradication was just beating with sticks, which didn't really destroy the plants... I will be able to pay off debts due to poppy - if they don't eradicate it.¹²⁵

5.5 Eradication

According to the MCN and UNODC, in 2011-12 an area of 1,784 hectares was eradicated in Badakhshan, an increase of nearly four times from 2010-11, and proportionately greater than the national increase of 154 percent. Eradication took place in villages within Argo, Baharak, Darayim, Jurm, Khash, Kishim, Shahri Buzurg, and Tashkan districts. Eradication was done variously by

121 Interview with farmer, Jurm.

122 Interview with farmer, Jurm.

123 FEWS NET notes that one possible secondary effect of the loss of livestock will be that households will now be able to produce fewer livestock products such as milk and meat which would ordinarily provide a key protein source to get them through the following winter, which could create higher food insecurity. While this was projected primarily for the Wakhan and extreme northern Badakhshan, it is likely to occur in other areas of the province. See FEWS NET, "Afghanistan Food Security Outlook."

124 Interview with farmer, Jurm.

125 Interview with farmer, Jurm.

machine (tractor), hand (sticks and blade), and animal plough. Eradication in the province began on 23 May 2012 (fairly late in the cropping cycle), towards the end of the fieldwork. According to official reporting, there were three incidents (two attacks in Argo, and one attack and demonstration in Darayim) leading to one injury.¹²⁶ In Badakhshan, poppy is planted in autumn or spring, with the main harvest occurring in late June to early July. Due to the harsh winter and late-arriving spring, the 2012 harvest in Badakhshan was said to be delayed.

If the above eradication figures are accurate, they represent a very sharp break with past experience and a very different outcome than that foreseen by surveyed households in the fieldwork areas at the time of planting. The figures would also represent an almost inconceivable level of eradication in the province – nearly one-half of cultivated area. Respondents observed that in the past the government was not really serious about eradication, and in some cases, “they only tickled it with sticks.” There was almost no eradication in Jurm in 2010-11, while in Khash there had been eradication in two villages near Faizabad. Respondents noted that the provincial authorities had focused on Khash because cultivation had increased there, and so had wanted to make an example of it.

A typical comment came from an average size landholder who was growing both poppy and *chars*, “Last year others grew poppy and the government didn’t say anything, so I am growing this year. The government wasn’t paying attention. I want my life to become even better than it did this past year. Because the price of opium went up, I decided to plant.”¹²⁷

Similarly, one labourer noted:

*The government won’t be really serious about eradication. The police and the military are from the local people, and so they can’t eradicate. It’s all just nemayesh [for appearances]. They can’t become enemies of the people. The government hasn’t done anything for the people, so they can’t eradicate. People will rise up and create another gadwadi [confusion].*¹²⁸

Farmers in Jurm seemed to be growing opium poppy because there was no eradication last year, while in Khash people were growing despite eradication last year.¹²⁹

Most farmers who were growing poppy seemed to have made the calculation that even if they were eradicated, the less-than-robust character of that eradication would leave them better off than not growing poppy at all. For instance, one grower in Khash said, “compared with wheat, opium output is much higher. If there is an eradication campaign, I will still have four *pow*¹³⁰ – still several times more than wheat. If the campaign doesn’t happen, then income will be very high and very good.”¹³¹

Another smallholder in Khash, some of whose plot of opium poppy had been eradicated the year before, had planted once again, although he had apparently substituted one-half *jerib* of *chars* for one-half *jerib* of poppy. “My land was next to the road, so it was chosen. Others who were not so close to the road did not experience the same level – I was made an example of. This year, all the people are sowing so I am as well. Even if they have an eradication campaign, it will still be better than wheat. It provides good income. Everyone is sowing more this year.”¹³²

126 MCN/UNODC, “Afghanistan Poppy Eradication Verification.”

127 Interview with farmer, Jurm.

128 Interview with labourer, Faizabad.

129 Adam Pain reported a defiant attitude towards government eradication in 2011. See Pain, “Opium Poppy Strikes Back.”

130 One *pow* equals 435 grams, or nearly one pound.

131 Interview with farmer, Khash.

132 Interview with farmer, Khash; As noted above, 23 of the 27 households were calculated not to be able to meet their wheat requirements from own production. Seventeen of these chose to grow poppy in 2011-12, but so had four of seven other households. The sample is not large enough to determine whether those below wheat subsistence made different cropping choices.

Likewise, a middle-sized landowner was sceptical about the effect that eradication would have:

Last year I had good opium, but it was eradicated. If it hadn't been eradicated, it would have yielded 12 pow per jerib, so I lost a bit more than half. My land was close to the road. The effect of eradication is to grow more opium. The government comes late - not at the time of planting. They should come at the beginning and be serious, and not let off the people who have shenakht [friendship] with the governor and district governor. There should be one type of campaign. Maybe people will grow more next year. The people have taken a pledge to be united and to try to get the government to stop the campaign. The government has promised [to do development], but has done nothing.¹³³

Another smallholder farmer who had experienced eradication the previous year had increased land devoted to poppy:

This year water is very good. Last year was not bad. I had good opium yield last year because the weather was warm, but the government's campaign made everything bad. This year I have increased the amount of opium. Without this, people's livelihoods will suffer. Opium cultivation has become like a spring for the people. If my opium is not eradicated, I will be able to settle my debts. If it is, I will have to sell animals in order to repay the debts. I have to repay the debts, as I got the money from my father-in-law and they have done me a favour. This is a good year for agriculture. It may get even better if the government doesn't eradicate. If the government is serious, they should do something at the time of planting. Doing it at harvest time is very harmful. They have not helped in any way.¹³⁴

In Khash, some claimed that they had permission to grow opium poppy dating back to the Zahir Shah era, and that in addition the government had not fulfilled its promises. The calculation was that even if they eradicate, they will still leave enough so that the return is better than wheat.

Government assistance in transition to licit livelihoods

Parts of the above comments reflect the widespread complaint that the government had not done much in those three years to help households transition from poppy to licit crops and activities. As in Balkh, this perceived lack of response is cited by many as to why they are returning to cultivation. As has been noted elsewhere, many respondents held the government responsible for the lack of attention to livelihoods. As one smallholder who was not growing poppy at the time of fieldwork noted, "it is possible that the situation will get even worse, if the government doesn't find work for the people. If the situation doesn't improve, maybe I'll grow 100 percent of my land to opium."¹³⁵ It is also possible, of course, that respondents find it convenient to blame the government for their own decision to grow a prohibited crop.

Most respondents acknowledged that there had been government programs to distribute wheat and rice in order to discourage poppy. However, all respondents - regardless of whether or not they had received anything - emphasised that the quantities were far too small to make a difference. For instance, most respondents said that households received two *ser* of wheat seed and two *ser* of rice in exchange for promises to not grow opium poppy. Given that the average irrigated wheat yield among surveyed households in Badakhshan was 82 *ser* (574 kg) per *jerib*, and the average irrigated landholding was 10.2 *jerib*, if the distribution discouraged planting, it was certainly not through financial compensation for income foregone. Based on typical yields, the value of wheat production from the 0.5 *jerib* that could be sown with government-provided wheat seed would be 8,667 Afs, as compared with 14,130 Afs which could be gained from opium poppy production on the same land, a differential of almost two-thirds. In terms of wheat consumption, a typical household of 11 persons would obtain 52 days' supply of wheat from planting the 0.5 *jerib* with the provided wheat seed, while it would obtain 85 days' supply from converting 0.5 *jerib* of opium to wheat.

133 Interview with farmer, Jurm.

134 Interview with farmer, Khash.

135 Interview with farmer, Jurm.

According to respondents, during eradication in Khash in 2010-11, twenty allotments of 100 kg wheat seed were allocated to landowners who had lost their crop. In the event, however, elders decided that the wheat should be distributed amongst all, so each household received the trivial amount of three *ser*. This amount provides the grain requirement for 42 person days. As such, for the average household of 11 members, the distribution would cover grain requirements for less than four days. As one farmer whose opium poppy had been eradicated noted, "The government distributed wheat and rice for not growing poppy - two *ser* wheat and one *ser* rice. The government is laughing at me. What comes out of this? This doesn't get me through two days!"¹³⁶

Respondents said that with such a limited land base, no other economic opportunity, and lack of government follow-through in fulfilling promises, they have no choice but to grow opium. More than one respondent noted the overall positive effect that cultivation previously had on the local economy by noting that "opium is the *kar khana* [factory] of the people." Similar attributes (high gross returns, stable store of value) were attributed to *chars*.

To conclude, in the fieldwork areas in Badakhshan, opium poppy cultivation remains a key aspect of household livelihoods strategies due to the superior returns compared with any alternatives in addition to the lack of a credible threat of thorough eradication. Particularly in the spring of 2012, households also saw opium poppy cultivation as a way out of the debts they had incurred due to the preceding harsh winter. Moreover, poor transport, lack of marketing channels, and a short growing season limit alternatives in places such as Khash and Jurm.¹³⁷

136 Interview with farmer, Jurm.

137 As Mansfield notes, "Within these more remote areas farmers did not see vegetable production as a viable alternative to opium poppy cultivation as there was no effective demand within the area, transportation costs were too high and traders were not purchasing at the farm gate." See Mansfield, "Governance, Security and Economic Growth," 23.

6. Summary and conclusions

Despite a 154 percent increase in the area eradicated by the Afghan government in 2011-12, as compared with the previous year, the area cultivated to opium in Afghanistan increased by 18 percent over the previous year. Balkh Province will retain the “poppy-free” status it achieved in 2007, although the security situation in some of the growing areas has not allowed independent verification. The cultivation of at least some poppy in parts of two or three districts has been generally acknowledged, and there is conflicting information on the extent of cultivation. In Badakhshan, the area cultivated increased by 13 percent, and the province will now be classified as a “moderate” producer.

Balkh and Badakhshan provinces differ greatly – geographically, economically, and politically – in ways that have affected the dynamics which influence opium poppy cultivation and the prospects for its reduction and elimination. In some sense, this is a consequence of geography. Most of the populated areas of Balkh are relatively flat and fertile, with decent road connections to the provincial centre and with other output and labour markets. Badakhshan’s population, on the other hand, is widely dispersed across a vast area and separated by mountainous terrain, connected only tenuously by poor roads, and possessing an unproductive climate.

In addition, the history of politics in the two provinces (influenced in part by geography) has influenced the dynamics of opium poppy cultivation. Since 2004 Balkh has been led by one dominant leader who has largely followed the line on state-building objectives and who has been capable of imposing his will on most areas of the province. In Badakhshan, on the other hand, there has been no such dominant figure, and power has been contested and fragmented among local commanders and power holders. The September 2011 assassination of Burhanuddin Rabbani, the province’s most significant political figure, further fuelled power struggles and competition for political power and economic assets, such as poppy, mines, and smuggling. In fact during his life the nature of his control and influence within the province allowed for significant fragmentation and disorder to exist. Despite the politics and security forces in Badakhshan having been largely dominated by Rabbani and other Jamiat politicians and this network having benefitted Jamiatis throughout the province, there have been power struggles, for example, with elements aligned with the Panjshiri branch such as those affiliated to Marshall Fahim.

In both provinces, the attainment of local positions through appointments made from Kabul can reinforce political power by way of patronage and impunity. In Balkh, in line with Atta’s approach of generally following central government policy, there have been fewer commanders who have retained overt involvement in illicit activities. In Badakhshan, there have been fewer similar opportunities (including for contracting and other economic activities related to the international presence), and so commanders and power holders have remained involved in smuggling, narcotics, and other illicit activities.

Fieldwork conducted in the two districts of each province which are currently or have been sites for opium poppy cultivation yielded results largely reinforcing the bigger picture. Surveyed households in Balkh were on average better-off than those in Badakhshan, while the latter households were more reliant on off-farm income. In Badakhshan, 26 of 30 surveyed households were getting by on \$2 per day or less. In both areas, farming conditions were reported to be much better than the previous year when a drought affected much of northern Afghanistan and a long, harsh winter affected Badakhshan. Households in Badakhshan noted that the winter had caused many of them to go into debt or to sell assets to purchase fodder for their animals and in some cases had killed livestock. In both areas, farmers shifted from wheat to higher-value cash crops; cotton in Balkh and opium in Badakhshan. In Badakhshan, the number of surveyed households growing poppy doubled from ten to twenty-one, and the proportion of farmed land planted to poppy increased from four to ten percent.

Along with more favourable agricultural conditions, labourers in Balkh reported that work opportunities were much more plentiful and wages higher in 2012, suggesting that Mazar continues to attract casual and semi-skilled labourers from the rural areas. On the other hand,

labourers in Badakhshan reported that demand for work had been delayed by the lingering winter, and it was not clear to what extent it would rebound. In both provinces, labourers talked wistfully about the “good old days” when opium poppy had primed the economy and created livelihoods for labourers, shopkeepers, and other merchants, in addition to farmers. While Badakhshan continues to be considered a drug transit route, this activity does not generate the same widespread incomes as did the extensive cultivation of the mid-2000s.

In Balkh, the cultivation of opium poppy continues to be correlated with insecurity, with the fairly well-delineated areas suspected of growing also being the insecure areas where the government’s writ does not extend. According to the standard narrative, the cultivation of opium poppy is seen to have followed insecurity, yet it must at least be considered possible that the causality runs in both directions, and that at least some of the insecurity may be the result of stresses and grievances connected with the suppression of cultivation.

In Badakhshan, cultivation is more dispersed across most of the province’s 26 districts; in the fieldwork areas, cultivation was associated with economic damage wrought by the harsh winter and the lack of a credible threat of eradication. Those households which grew opium poppy in Badakhshan associated it with the ability to liquidate debts and to generally improve their economic situation. In both provinces, respondents cited the lack of development assistance as having driven them to cultivate opium poppy, but this may be a justification as much as a reason. While respondents reported that there had been government programs to distribute wheat and rice as compensation for giving up opium poppy, these were considered ineffective to the point of being laughable. In sum, in the fieldwork areas in Badakhshan opium poppy cultivation remains a key aspect of household livelihoods strategies due to the superior returns compared with any alternative and the lack of a credible threat of a thorough eradication. Particularly in 2012, households also viewed opium poppy cultivation as a way out of the debts they incurred due to the harsh winter.

At the provincial level, while Balkh has again achieved “poppy-free” status, independent reports about the presence of poppy raise questions about the metrics. Balkh has been lauded as a successful model not just for the elimination of opium poppy but also more broadly for economic development taking place under a strong provincial administration. Were Balkh to drop from the ranks of the “poppy-free” provinces, this would reverberate more widely both within the counter-narcotics world and beyond. Therefore, there are strong incentives and interests among the provincial administration, the Kabul government, and the international community in seeing that Balkh remains “poppy-free.” There are also powerful incentives among many stakeholders to continue to show success, especially where that success has become emblematic. One could even argue that broad segments of the population in the province have an interest, as any diminution of the province’s reputation would have the potential to alter confidence and the current favourable situation.

A different set of questions arises from the assertion of the government and UNODC that 48 percent of planted area in Badakhshan was eradicated, a radically higher ratio than the national total of six percent and more than a four-fold increase in percentage over 2010-11. Aside from the official figures, interviews and crop reports suggested that in Jurm, households were growing opium poppy because there was no eradication the previous year, while households in Khash were growing despite eradication. The increase in cultivation in Badakhshan in 2011-12 occurred in the context of continued competition for control and economic benefits in a province without dominant leadership, and where there appears to be an absence of both will and ability. If the eradication numbers are accurate, they represent a sharp break with the past, and it will be interesting to see whether this represents a more ambitious attempt by authorities to impose their will in the districts of Badakhshan in a way which has heretofore not been seen. Until now, there has been a more tentative and less aggressive approach, which may be realistic given the competition among local power holders and the absence of the strong, dominant leadership seen in Balkh. The Balkh experience may also suggest the danger of too ambitious pressure in the absence of alternatives.

6.1 Looking forward

While drugs seem to have lost prominence on the policy agenda, with the dynamics associated with the 2014 Transition likely to have an effect on many aspects of the political economy, this is not likely to remain the case for very long. Among the many open questions is whether the Afghan government will have the motivation and means to maintain the unpopular coercive approach which has characterised drug policy implementation, sometimes in apparent contradiction of the policy itself (i.e., the timing and location of eradication consistent with assuring livelihoods).

While Balkh and Badakhshan have very different dynamics, at present it is hard to see any factors which could significantly reduce cultivation in either of the two provinces in the foreseeable future. The coercion that has played a significant role in suppressing cultivation will be harder to maintain in an unstable and/or contested environment or a quasi-controlled one. Therefore, any reductions in state reach are likely to result in an increase in the amount of opium poppy cultivated. It is not simply that these areas are beyond the reach of the state. Rather, maintenance of the larger stability may require provincial and national officials to make deals, explicit or implicit, with local power holders. If Balkh were, through any one of a number of scenarios, to be governed in a less unified way, it is not hard to imagine the effects of a split and likely competitive administration at the local level. There is evidence that such power holders (e.g., Zalmay Khan in Badakhshan) have begun preparation for post-2014 instability. Regardless of intentions, it is likely that the government (and the international community) will be pre-occupied with other issues, and therefore will be unlikely to apply consistent pressure on local officials and communities to absorb unpopular programs. In Badakhshan, there has to date been very little incentive, with “good officials” having trouble living in the districts. With the closing of most of the international military bases across the north and the consolidation of personnel at Camp Marmal, there will be even less oversight (or threat of oversight). It should be noted that the 2013-14 growing season will also coincide with the presidential election season.

While introduction of the *arbaki* was seen to have improved security in the two Balkh districts, which in turn allowed the government presence that maintained the suppression of cultivation, the population is not confident that this security effect will endure. Moreover, concerns have been expressed about the role that the *arbaki* may play – either contributing directly to instability or exacting a price for not doing so. There have also been allegations of *arbaki* involvement in cultivation.

Finally, in both provinces households are dependent on off-farm income, either through finding work nearby or through longer-distance out-migration. Yet the anticipated context is one of a contracting economy as much of the stimulus provided by international civilian and military spending continues to subside. Under most scenarios, the 2014 Transition is likely to reduce the opportunities for off-farm employment within Afghanistan, which has been key in both provinces, as well as dry up many sources of patronage. Therefore, pressure to relax the suppression of cultivation may be in proportion to the contraction in the economy of Mazar, the strength of which many feel has allowed the imposition of policies which would otherwise have harmed people’s incomes and livelihoods. Migration to Iran has likewise become less and less attractive due to increasing restrictions put on Afghan migrants and the loss of value of the Iranian currency due in large part to western economic sanctions.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Opium cultivation (2006-2012) and eradication (2011-2012) in Afghanistan

PROVINCE	Cultivation 2006 (ha)	Cultivation 2007 (ha)	Cultivation 2008 (ha)	Cultivation 2009 (ha)	Cultivation 2010 (ha)	Cultivation 2011 (ha)	Cultivation 2012 (ha)	Change 2011-2012 (%)	Eradication in 2011	Eradication in 2012
Kabul	80	500	310	132	152	220	120	-45%	80	103
Khost	133	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Logar	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Paktya	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Panjshir	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Parwan	124	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Wardak	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Ghazni	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Paktika	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Central Region total	337	500	310	132	152	220	120	-45%	80	103
Kapisa	282	835	436	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	181	290	+60%	5	54
Kunar	932	446	290	164	154	578	1,279	+121%	1	70
Laghman	710	561	425	135	234	624	877	+41%	21	76
Nangarhar	4,872	18,739	Poppy-free	294	719	2,700	3,151	+17%	61	784
Nuristan	1,516	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Eastern Region total	8,312	20,581	1,151	593	1,107	4,082	5,596	+37%	89	985
Badakhshan	13,056	3,642	200	557	1,100	1,705	1,927	+13%	367	1,784
Takhar	2,178	1,211	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Kunduz	102	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
North-eastern Region total	15,336	4,853	200	557	1,100	1,705	1,927	+13%	367	1,784

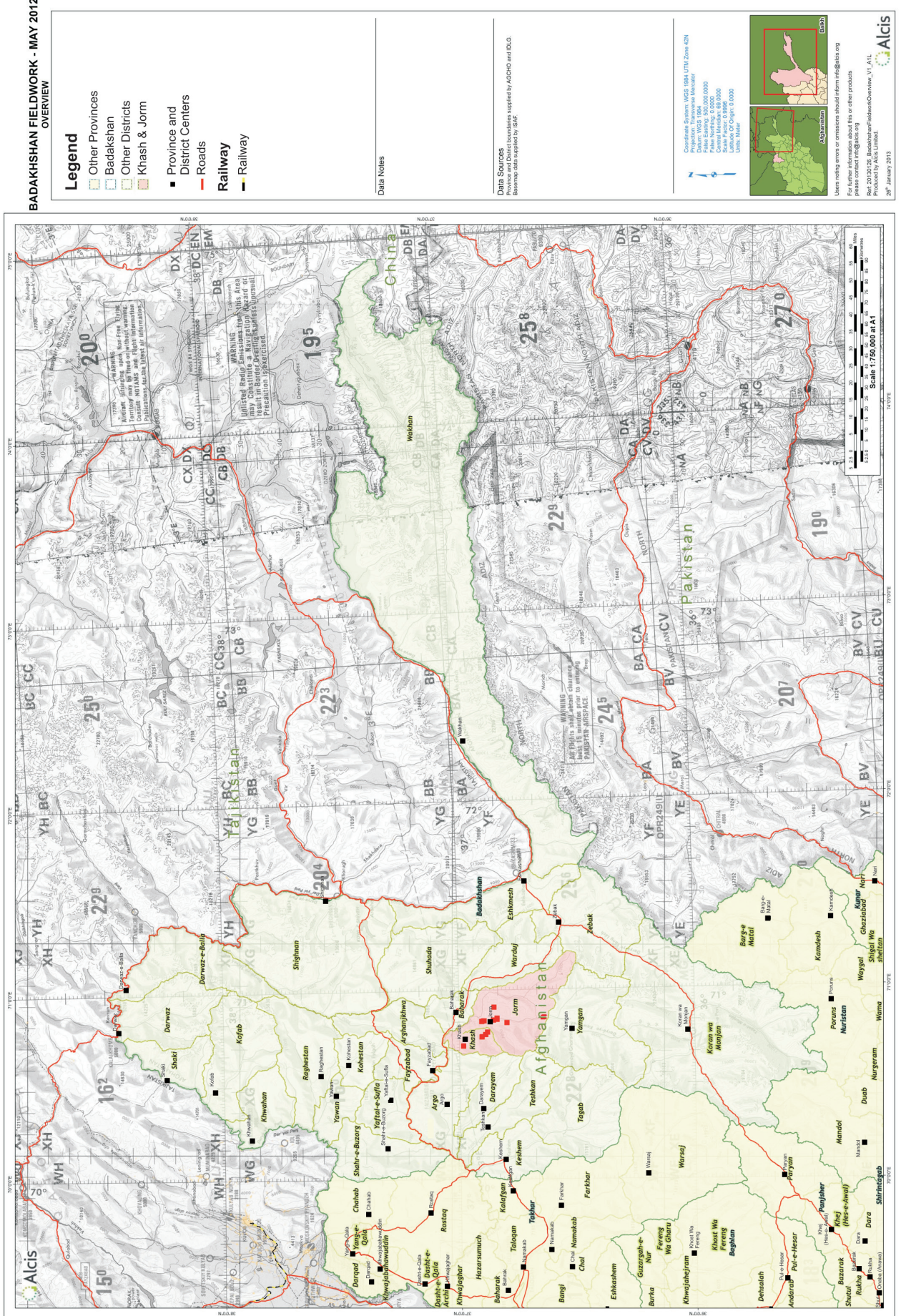
PROVINCE	Cultivation 2006 (ha)	Cultivation 2007 (ha)	Cultivation 2008 (ha)	Cultivation 2009 (ha)	Cultivation 2010 (ha)	Cultivation 2011 (ha)	Cultivation 2012 (ha)	Change 2011-2012 (%)	Eradication in 2011	Eradication in 2012
Baghlan	2,742	671	475	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	161	177	+10%	31	252
Balkh	7,232	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Bamyan	17	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Faryab	3,040	2,866	291	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	145	Poppy-free	NA	2	50
Jawzjan	2,024	1,085	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Samangan	1,960	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Sari Pul	2,252	260	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Northern Region total	19,267	4,882	766	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	305	177	-42%	34	302
Hilmand	69,324	102,770	103,590	69,833	65,045	63,307	75,176	+19%	1,940	3,637
Kandahar	12,619	16,615	14,623	19,811	25,835	27,213	24,341	-11%	287	922
Uruzgan	9,703	9,204	9,939	9,224	7,337	10,620	10,508	-1%	154	485
Zabul	3,210	1,611	2,335	1,144	483	262	424	+62%	85	88
Day Kundi	7,044	3,346	2,273	3,002	1,547	1,003	1,058	+5%	235	236
Southern Region total	101,900	133,546	132,760	103,014	100,247	102,405	111,507	+9%	2,701	5,368
Badghis	3,205	4,219	587	5,411	2,958	1,990	2,363	+19%	36	53
Farah	7,694	14,865	15,010	12,405	14,552	17,499	27,733	+58%	212	316
Ghor	4,679	1,503	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	125	NA	43	11
Herat	2,287	1,525	266	556	360	366	1,080	+195%	227	600
Nimroz	1,955	6,507	6,203	428	2,039	2,493	3,808	+53%	20	148
Western Region total	19,820	28,619	22,066	18,800	19,909	22,348	35,109	+57%	539	1,130
Total (rounded)	165,000	193,000	157,000	123,000	123,000	131,000	154,000	18%	3,810	9,672

Source: UNODC/MCN, "Afghanistan Opium Survey 2012"

Note: A province is defined as poppy-free when it is estimated to have less than 100 ha of opium cultivation. Due to administrative boundary changes, estimates for Farah and Nimroz for 2009 and later were calculated considering parts of Khash Rod District, the main opium cultivating district in Nimroz, as being in Farah province. Figures for 2008 and before include all of Khash Rod district in Nimroz province. Source: MCN/UNODC.

Due to difficulties in acquiring the satellite imagery which are normally used for the annual opium survey over the province of Herat, a different estimation methodology was used which limits comparability with previous years.

Appendix 3: Map 2: Badakhshan Province



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