

**Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit  
Case Study Series**

**Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories:  
Evidence from Faryab**



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## Glossary

<i>arbab</i>	traditional village leader, often a big landlord
<i>arbaki</i>	community-based armed/militia group
<i>bai</i>	wealthy person
<i>band</i>	dam
<i>dunya</i>	the world/worldly wealth
<i>gillim</i>	type of flat, woven carpet
<i>jerib</i>	unit of land measurement, approximately one-fifth of a hectare
<i>Jawza</i>	third month of the solar year in the Afghan Calendar
<i>khana saman</i>	servant
<i>madrassa</i>	religious school
<i>palas</i>	type of flat, woven carpet with simple pattern
<i>paykal</i>	measure for irrigated land; one <i>paykal</i> covers 500 <i>jeribs</i> of land
<i>qachaq bar</i>	human smuggler
<i>qalin</i>	rug: type of woven carpet consisting of a pile knotted into a textile backing.
<i>qaryadar</i>	traditional community head, recognised by the government, who is responsible for village affairs
<i>qawm</i>	translated as “tribe” or “kin”
<i>saracha</i>	Toyota station wagon
<i>shura</i>	traditional council
<i>taqawi</i>	small amount of informal in-kind credit, often foodstuff and primarily wheat, typically repaid at the next harvest time
<i>ushr</i>	one-tenth of land productions given as charity
<i>woliswal</i>	district governor
<i>zakat</i>	small percentage of properties given to charity on an annual base

## Acronyms

Afs	Afghani, unit of currency
ALT	Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
CDC	Community Development Council
CHA	Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FFW	Food for Work
FGD	focus group discussion
GoA	Government of Afghanistan
HDK	Hezb-i Demokratik-i Khalq
NGO	nongovernmental organisation
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
WFP	World Food Programme

## Executive Summary

This report explores dynamics of rural livelihoods in three villages of Faryab Province. It is part of a larger study called Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories (ALT), which looks at livelihood change over the last eight to nine years in four provinces of Afghanistan: Kandahar, Badakhshan, Sar-i-Pul and Faryab. The study builds on earlier research conducted by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) in 2003-04. It aims to build in-depth understanding of sources of change in livelihood and welfare regimes throughout the years, informed by changes in the contexts within which people lead their lives and the practices they implement to cope with these changes.

Evidence from Faryab shows notable deterioration in the livelihood security of the three study villages (Villages A, B and C), each with a dominant ethnic group (Turkmen, Uzbek and Pashtun, respectively). Drought and physical insecurity linked to frequent political changes in Faryab, and more recently to insurgent infiltration, are the two drivers for the livelihood decline. It is important to note that the deterioration has not affected each village to the same degree; its extent depends on the livelihood resources available to each village and on political affiliations linked to ethnicity. This means that the ability to access more livelihood resources increased livelihood resilience, while affiliation with the groups dominating politics during different phases of conflict also brought more physical security and, at times, material benefits.

During the first period of drought from 1999-2001, rain-fed lands, which were more commonly held in Village C than in Villages A and B, were affected more severely than irrigated lands; but the combination of physical insecurity with drought during this time meant Villages A and B were harder hit by the combined effects than Pashtun-dominated Village C. The second period of drought started only two years after the first period ended, lasting from 2004-08. The short gap between droughts did not offer enough opportunity to recover from the effects of the first drought before the second hit. The second drought also lasted longer and its end-stage overlapped with the global rise in food prices, with negative effects locally. As well, from 2007 the study district experienced growing insurgent infiltration, limiting movement to land-holdings outside of the villages due to risk of attack. However, agriculture was not the only livelihood activity affected by the droughts and insecurity. Long-term decline in livestock-holdings affected livelihoods generally, as well as carpet weaving. The carpet sector, particularly important to Village A, was also affected by the recent global financial crisis, which reduced demand, and local and regional insecurity affected trade routes.

The study argues that context is very important to livelihoods—village context, as well as district and provincial context. In this case, the province's complex political history, linked with ethnic diversity across the study villages, tells a story of rising and falling fortunes across leadership changes. Each village's ethnic composition allowed it to escape the effects of insecurity during some periods of political instability while being hard hit during others. Taxation, provision of soldiers and food to armed groups, limited access of villagers to their pastures and farming lands, destruction of houses, and looting of property are ways through which insecurity and direct conflict have affected the villages' livelihood security. Moreover, increasing physical insecurity since 2007 due to the presence of insurgents has again brought concerns over access to pastures and farming lands, taxation by insurgents, cash demands to arm an *arbaki* (a community-based armed group) as well as to guard village social assets, all of which have direct effects on livelihoods in the villages. Village C also faces ethnic prejudice due to the connection in many people's minds of the insurgents with Pashtuns.

The evidence points to different mechanisms used by the study villages to cope with the consequences of drought and insecurity, the drivers of livelihood decline. While respondents clearly wanted state intervention, and not an *arbaki* or other means of self-protection, to bring greater security, this was not forthcoming. Villages had to act on their own to arm a state-sanctioned militia, and in the case of Village B, guards for its school. This raised questions for some respondents about the state's legitimacy. Village respondents also relied largely on community support and social links, as well as mobilizing more or different labour resources to cope with drought. International labour migration, a practice with a long history in Afghanistan as a means of livelihood diversification, was used to address both the lack of employment during drought and young men's risks in the face of growing insecurity. Reliance on women's economic contributions, informal credit and safety nets, and marriage to build social links or, in some cases, to gain bride price are other approaches respondents from the study villages undertook to mitigate livelihood insecurity. While short-term food aid delivered by external actors near the end of the second drought reportedly helped the study villages to survive the drought, developments such as construction of the ring road and provision of electricity opened up new opportunities for expanded livelihood activities and access to markets, with longer-term potential.



# 1. Introduction and Study Background

In 2002-04, the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), in partnership with seven non-governmental organisations (NGOs), implemented an 18-month European Commission-funded research project monitoring the livelihoods of 390 households, across 21 villages in seven districts in seven provinces.<sup>1</sup> The provinces and districts were selected to provide case study examples of contrast with respect to agro-ecology and economy. The aim of the research was to build understanding of rural livelihoods in Afghanistan, on the grounds that much policy and programming was largely based on preconceptions of what people in rural areas did, and that it focused on delivery of programmes and paid little attention to understanding the context within which people lived.

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

In 2008, AREU secured new research funding from the Economic and Social Research Council of the United Kingdom<sup>3</sup> to revisit a selection of the sites and households, to investigate how their circumstances had changed and to consider what factors might have brought these changes about. The focus of new research was therefore on livelihood trajectories. Five of the original provinces were selected for the restudy: Badakhshan, Faryab, Kandahar, Herat and Sar-i-Pul. Ghazni and Laghman were dropped at the design stage because of insecurity. Herat was abandoned after the restudy commenced because of insecurity in the Hari Rud Valley. In Faryab, the focus of this case study, the research approach was modified because of security issues, as explained in Section 2. This changing security environment and its effects on the three study villages (Villages A, B and C) is one focus of the study, along with the effects of and responses to two phases of drought experienced in northern Afghanistan.

Four major questions have structured this study:

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

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

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

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

adapted to and engaged with state absence? What does this tell us about the nature of resilience, its scope, reach, and the inclusiveness of its mechanisms?

- To what extent do trajectories of change reflect path dependency<sup>4</sup> or the capacity of individuals or communities to bring about changes through collective action? If there have been shifts, where, for whom and how have they been possible?

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

A growing body of evidence emphasises the fact that rural Afghan households have demonstrated a significant degree of resilience throughout various crises. In 2001, a humanitarian agenda drove the initial international response, with assumptions of destruction and disaster, despite field evidence that suggested otherwise.<sup>5</sup> While there was evidence of chronic malnutrition, assessments showed little incidence of acute malnutrition. As well, grain markets did not fail during conflict. Claims of a cash crisis<sup>6</sup> and a dearth of credit<sup>7</sup> were not supported by evidence.<sup>8</sup> The investigation of the nature of this resilience, the social practices that have contributed to it, and the extent to which it has been affected by reconstruction processes over these last several years has been a critical part of this study.

This report begins by outlining in Section 2 the methodological approach taken to study livelihood change, before examining in Section 3 the context-specific factors that shape the livelihoods of the study households. Section 4 describes the factors influencing livelihood decline in the study sites, while Section 5 examines the responses made in the face of these adverse livelihood conditions. Section 6 concludes with the discussion.

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4 Path dependency is the idea that previous events predetermine subsequent possibilities or household history.

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

6 S. Lautze, E. Stites, N. Nojumi and F. Najimi, "Qaht-e-Pool: 'A Cash Famine': Food Insecurity in Afghanistan, 1999-2002" (Medford, MA, USA: Feinstein International Famine Center, Tufts University, 2002), <http://famine.tufts.edu/research/natsios.html>.

7 S. Rasmusson, "The Current Situation of Rural Finance in Afghanistan," in *Rural Finance in Afghanistan: The Challenges of the Opium Economy*, 20-4 (Kabul: World Bank, 2005).

8 Floortje Klijin and Adam Pain, *Finding the Money: Informal Credit Practices in Rural Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2007).

## 2. Methodology

The main means of data collection in the Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories (ALT) study are detailed household interviews. Through focusing on a detailed examination of economic, social and historical dimensions of household livelihoods since 2002-03, the interviews aim to achieve a holistic understanding of livelihood change and the factors that have brought it about. The study is framed in the examination of meso- and macro-level factors influencing livelihood trajectories. Therefore, the research seeks to understand not only what changes have taken place in household livelihoods and why, but also to place the changes in the context within which people manage their livelihoods. Consequently, the household and individuals within it are the central units of analysis, and their experiences are placed within village, district and provincial contexts.

For the Faryab case, presented here, this approach had to change. The rise in insurgent activity in the study district of Dawlatabad meant that the team's regular access to the three study villages was not safe for village residents<sup>9</sup> or the field team. For the same reason, the team could not reside in the study district or travel daily on the road from either of the two urban centres in the province, due to the security risk of establishing travel routines. Therefore this case study focuses primarily on the village as the unit of analysis instead of the household and focuses specifically on how two major changes in the study area—drought and rising insecurity—have affected lives and livelihoods across the three sites. It aims to gain broad knowledge of how the changes impacted different ethnic groups within the villages, intra-village relationships and the village economy. It obtained the richest data from focus group discussions (FGDs) with residents in the study villages, most of whom were respondents in the previous study. These data were supplemented with household and key informant interviews.<sup>10</sup> Details of the approach and challenges faced by the field team are provided below.

### 2.1. Data collection procedure

The field team, composed of two women and two men, based themselves in Maimana and collected the data during the month of November 2009. From this base the men made an initial trip to each village to meet village leaders and inform them of the start of the study. Leaders of Village C were met outside of the village due to the level of risk in having outsiders enter. These meetings served to identify a key local individual in each village—often an elder with a reputation for being influential—who assisted the field team in locating the male and female respondents and arranging for them to come to Maimana for FGDs. The field team used information from household profiles drawn from the 2002-04 study data to make a list of names of the households' male or female heads for use in locating the households.

In order to better capture a range of experiences of the changes that took place since 2002, the households from the 2002-03 study were divided into two groups based on their wealth ranking from the previous study: one with those from the top two wealth groups and one with those from the poorest group. FGDs were done with representatives from the two wealth groups for each village, with each group composed of between six and nine people. This separation was expected to make it more likely that respondents in the lower wealth group would speak freely. Ideally, FGDs were to be conducted using this approach with both women and men from the villages. However, this was not

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<sup>9</sup> Village elders advised the field team not to enter Village C at all and to make visits to Villages A and B few and sporadic. Local government officials also gave the same advice.

<sup>10</sup> The field team conducted 8 FGDs, 13 household interviews and 13 key informant interviews.

accomplished due to the effect of insecurity on women's mobility. Only two FGDs with women were conducted, one in Village A and one in Village B.

To obtain some detailed knowledge of household perspectives, two individuals were selected from among each set of FGD participants to be interviewed about their household experiences. These two individuals were selected on the basis of information they provided during the FGD showing them to have a significant role in the village and/or to have suffered some type of livelihood crisis.

The field procedures used to identify respondents and conduct the interviews are summarised as follows:

- *Household profile:* On the basis of 2002 household data, a household profile was developed for each of the 20 households per village from the original study as the first stage of the restudy. The profiles summarised basic data on household composition and economy in 2002-03. For the Faryab study, these profiles were mainly used to locate the respondents rather than as a base to explore household-level livelihood changes, since the depth of household interviews was less than in other sites.
- *Developing interview guides:* A guide for the FGDs was developed prior to the fieldwork. It was designed to explore the main changes that took place in the villages and their effects. The general household interview guide of the ALT study was refocused to accommodate holding only one short interview per household. It focused on exploring one or two significant events/changes that took place within the household, based on what was learned during the FGDs.
- *Focus group discussions:* Two male group discussions for each village were carried out. The participants of these FGDs were mainly male heads of the households from the 2002-03 study. Only two FGDs were carried out with women.
- *Household interviews:* After each FGD, two men among the participants were selected to be interviewed. The female team could only follow this step in one case.
- *Key informant interviews:* Key informant interviews played a more significant role in this site compared to the others. To fill gaps in the data regarding general changes that took place at the village level and sometimes at the district level, and regarding changes in women's lives, several interviews were carried out with elders in the three villages and representatives of governmental and non-governmental bodies. These included the provincial deputy governor, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the NSP facilitating partner. These included interviews with three women.

The research faced a range of challenges, many related to the deteriorating security situation. Insecurity limited the field team's travel to the villages and provided less opportunity to motivate participation and build trust in the communities. The team relied on a local leader to motivate participation, which allowed the study to go forward but it also meant the respondents were likely to be individuals from within this person's network. The diversity of respondents was likely lower than if the team had been able to identify them according to the procedure at other field sites. Insecurity and cultural norms particularly affected female participation. Few women were willing to travel to participate, and women from Village C were not allowed to travel at all. Those from Villages A and B who participated were close to the local support person and were not

necessarily members of the households from the previous study. FGD participants from Village A were female relatives and neighbours of the local support person. In Village B, the support person could only secure the participation of the female deputy head of the CDC *shura* (traditional council) and two old widows; none were representatives of the study households.

### 3. Faryab Province and Context

The study was conducted in Dawlatabad District, one of 15 districts in Faryab Province.<sup>11</sup> It lies some two and a half hours north of Maimana on the road to Andkhoy. The district is located in the foothills of the Hindu Kush mountain range, and has at its centre a large plain containing 30 villages with irrigated land, settled mainly by Uzbek and Turkmen people. All of these villages have irrigation, ground water resources, relatively large amounts of land, access to schools and health services, and are within 10-45 minute drives of the district centre. There is a second cluster of villages located in the low-lying hills that edge the plain. These are mainly Pashtun people making a living from a primarily rain-fed economy and livestock, and with problems of access to drinking water. To the east of the district lies the Dasht-e-Laili, an important grazing pasture source to which Dawlatabad has had access in the past.



This section provides details on the political and socioeconomic context of Faryab Province, Dawlatabad District and the three study villages. It sets the scene for a discussion in Sections 4 and 5 of the central factors underlying the deterioration in livelihood security experienced in the study villages over the last few years and how residents are responding to these changes.

#### 3.1 Political context

##### 1978-92

When the Hezb-i Demokratik-i Khalq (HDK)—the People’s Democratic Party—came to power in Afghanistan in April 1978, Faryab was not a politically active province. In general, among the small Uzbek intelligentsia of Faryab, sympathies for the HDK and for

<sup>11</sup> “Governance Profile: Faryab Province” (Kabul: United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, 2010).

its splinter group Guruh-i Kar (Workers' Group) ran high.<sup>12</sup> Turkmen, by contrast, were largely quiescent politically, not least because of very limited access to education. There is little indication of political activism among Tajiks or Pashtuns at that point in time.<sup>13</sup>

Although the clergy were not politically active at that time and the Islamist parties did not seem to have an active membership in the province, resistance to the regime of the HDK, and specifically of its radical Khalq wing, started soon, as the regime implemented radical reforms and repressed groups deemed to be hostile. After an initial phase of collaboration among the main leftist factions, which lasted a few months, the Khalqis instigated the departure from Faryab of members of Guruh-i Kar and of the more moderate wing of the HDK, Parcham. This weakened the Khalqis and the left in general at a time when conservative opposition was beginning to rise. The Khalqis cracked down on the clergy, arresting and killing a number of them even before actual resistance in Faryab had started. This only stimulated armed resistance. After 1979, several district centres were taken by the mujahiddin, at least for some time, and no corner of the province was spared from the violence.<sup>14</sup>

Three main resistance parties operated in the province: Harakat-i Enqelab-i Islami (Movement of the Islamic Revolution), Jamiat-i Islami (Islamic Society) and Hizb-i Islami (Islamic Party). The first two were by far the strongest and soon their local commanders started engaging in a bloody internecine war, which eventually caused more victims than the war against the government and the Soviet army. The infighting gradually led to the emergence of provincial strongmen, who achieved control or established influence over large portions of the province. The best known of them was Rasul Pahlawan, who started by taking over his own district of Shirin Tagab and expanded first to Dawlatabad and then to most of the other districts. A member of Harakat-i Enqelab, Pahlawan had difficulty fighting his bitter enemies of Jamiat-i Islami, who were better supplied than Harakat's commanders. In 1983 he joined the government militias, which allowed him to expand and improve his fighting force considerably. With government support, Rasul Pahlawan became the dominant warlord of Faryab. He had a reputation as a fearsome and ruthless fighter and gradually eliminated all rivals, either by defeating them in battle or by assassinating them.<sup>15</sup>

Concerning Dawlatabad specifically, the district in the 1980s was already characterised by ethnic tension between Uzbeks and Turkmen on one side and Pashtuns on the other; the settlement of Pashtuns in the area over the previous 100 years had given rise to tensions which remained very alive in that period. The dominant figure in the district during the first half of the 1980s was Auraz Zabet, a Turkmen strongman associated with Hezb-i Islami. However, when Rasul Pahlawan decided to move on Dawlatabad from Shirin Tagab, he easily defeated Auraz Zabet and forced him to flee. Rasul Pahlawan then proceeded to impose his authority, which was held to be more onerous in Dawlatabad than in any other district of Faryab.<sup>16</sup> Respondents from the Pashtun study village remember Rasul Pahlawan's rule as particularly prejudiced against their ethnic group, leading to asset losses and, in the end, the decision by many Pashtuns to migrate.

12 Guruh-i Kar was characterised by the view that ethnic discrimination should take precedence over class conflict. See Hedayatullah Hedoyat, "The Situation of the North After Saur Revolution" in *Alal Saqut-i Shamal* (Peshawar: n.d.).

13 Antonio Giustozzi, pers. comm. with former police officer for Maimana, December 2004.

14 Hedayatullah Hedoyat, *Alal Saqut-i Shamal* (Peshawar: n.d.).

15 Antonio Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud: Wars and Warlords in Afghanistan* (London: C Hurst and Co, 2010), 58.

16 Hedoyat, "*alal saqut-i shamal*," 61.

### **1992-2001**

Faryab was active in support of the 1992 revolt against President Mohammad Najibullah, which resulted in his downfall. In particular, the militias of Faryab, at that time mostly gathered under the control of Rasul Pahlawan as a brigade of the army, were key allies of General Abdul Rashid Dostum, who led the revolt. The same group emerged in the following months as founding members of Junbesh-i Milli Islami (National Islamic Movement), the party of the northern region, which remains an important political player to date. Rasul Pahlawan quickly crushed the remnants of Jamiat-i Islami, forcing them to flee to the neighbouring provinces. Growing friction between him and General Dostum may have been the cause of his assassination in 1996. The killing did not immediately result in the destabilisation of Faryab, as his brothers Guli Pahlawan and Abdul Malik took over. However, Abdul Malik's turn against Dostum in 1997 and the subsequent turmoil did end up destabilising Faryab. The province during all these years had been the front line in the confrontation between Junbesh and the Jamiat-led government in Kabul; from 1995 it became the front line in the confrontation between Junbesh and the Harakat-i Taliban (Movement of the Taliban), who took Herat in 1995 and Badghis in 1996. In early 1998, the Taliban entered Qaysar and pushed the front line into Faryab for the first time in the conflict involving the Taliban.<sup>17</sup>

In August 1998, the Taliban broke through the Faryab front line, rapidly taking over the North and forcing Abdul Malik, Guli Pahlawan and Dostum (as well as several others) into exile. The predominantly Pashtun Taliban imposed a strict regime of law and order in Faryab, but were perceived as biased toward the local Pashtun communities. This was noted also by the non-Pashtun study respondents and linked in their views to Rasul Pahlawan's treatment of Pashtuns.

The Taliban were seen as ruthless in their repression of any sign of resistance. But this resistance was limited and the number of collaborators, even among Uzbeks, greatly exceeded the number actively resisting. Among the most prominent collaborators was Hashim Habibi, an Uzbek who, before making a deal with the Taliban, had been Dostum's deputy in the province. Many of those most negatively affected by the Taliban's rule left the area, migrating to Pakistan or Iran.

### **2001-10**

As Operation Enduring Freedom unfolded in autumn 2001, reactions in Faryab were almost immediate. Hashim Habibi defected back to the anti-Taliban front, forcing the small Taliban garrison and the few local Taliban to flee the province. Habibi was rewarded with the appointment of commander of the local militia division, which was under the formal control of the Ministry of Defence but in fact affiliated with Junbesh and Dostum. Junbesh's control over Faryab did not go unchallenged. The province experienced a fair amount of factional fighting after 2001, resulting once again in the defeat of Jamiat at the hand of Junbesh. An internal rift within Junbesh in 2004 saw the departure of Hashim Habibi; Habibi had been coming too close to the Kabul-appointed governor, Qazi Enoyat, who had been trying to reduce Junbesh's influence within Faryab.<sup>18</sup>

In Dawlatabad, Auraz Zabet tried to re-establish himself as the dominant figure, the path having been cleared by the disappearance of the family of Rasul Pahlawan. Auraz Zabet was not popular among the local population, which seems to have mostly considered him an abusive figure. This is supported by a statement made by the leaders of Village

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17 Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud*, 69.

18 Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud*, 116-17, 124-5.



B, who noted that people did not think well of Zabet. Despite his close relationship with General Dostum, the strongmen of Faryab decided collectively to lobby Dostum against Zabet. Dostum convinced him to accept “exile” in Sheberghan in 2004.<sup>19</sup>

With the completion of the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) process in 2005, all of the officially registered militias of Faryab were disbanded. Most if not all of them maintained an underground presence, but the inability to operate openly weakened the control exercised by the strongmen over the militiamen. Other factors contributed to weakening the hold of the militias over Faryab. One was turmoil within Junbesh, between its reformist wing, inclined to turn the organisation into a proper political party and marginalise its military wing, and the strongmen, who had been the driving force within the party since its inception. This crisis led to the disruption of funding to Junbesh, and the strongmen stopped receiving funds from the centre; in turn, their ability to maintain retinues of armed men declined. Another reason was the unwillingness of Junbesh’s stakeholders to expose themselves to the accusation of being linked to armed groups. The accusation could have disrupted the electoral plans of Junbesh.<sup>20</sup>

The result of this weakening of Junbesh’s armed structure was the separation of a number of armed bands, often former local commanders of Junbesh or Jamiat, who had to seek alternative ways of securing revenue. It also opened a political and military vacuum that forces previously absent or marginal, and not so concerned with their image in Kabul, started to fill. One such example was Auraz Zabet, who in 2009 reappeared in Dawlatabad and reorganised his retinue of armed men. Another example is the Taliban, who had maintained some influence in the province through madrassas (religious schools). A majority of the mullahs of Faryab had been trained in Pakistan, a fact which favoured the survival of some sympathy for the Taliban and their views. Already in 2003-04, pro-Taliban preaching was reported in Dawlatabad, but until 2007 the Taliban had not been able to develop any military presence in Faryab. The establishment of a Taliban stronghold in neighbouring Badghis Province allowed for some Taliban infiltration from 2007 onward. Initially, efforts by the Taliban to infiltrate Faryab were not very successful; in particular, efforts to collect “tax” in border areas such as Qaysar met resistance. Gradually, however, the Taliban have been able to penetrate deeper and deeper into Faryab. This contributed to the spread of a climate of insecurity, the effects of which are explored for Dawlatabad. The police of Faryab are relatively proactive by Afghan standards, but they are too understaffed and under-resourced to effectively control the situation.<sup>21</sup>

After 2001, the set-up of the provincial administration has become a highly politicised issue, for a number of reasons. One is factional competition over control of the provincial administration. The first governor appointed to run the province was loyal to Junbesh, the dominant political faction in the province. This administration was perceived to be highly ineffective. The second governor of Faryab, Qazi Enoyat, as already mentioned, was appointed by the centre to undermine Junbesh’s influence. He proved to be a comparatively capable governor, but was expelled together with Hashim Habibi in 2004 as he had alienated Junbesh. The position was left vacant for some time, with the deputy governor, a Junbesh loyalist, acting as interim. His management was relatively

19 Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud*, 192.

20 Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud*, 197ff; Antonio Giustozzi, “Afghanistan: Political Parties or Militia Fronts?” in *From Soldiers to Politicians: Transforming Rebel Movements After Civil War*, ed. Jeroen de Zeeuw, (Boulder, CO, USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007), 179-202.

21 Antonio Giustozzi, interviews with United Nations officials, foreign diplomats, police officers, members of parliament and members of the provincial councils, (Maimana and Kabul: 2008-2010).

competent, but he was replaced in 2005 by Amir Latif, the former governor of Kunduz and a former commander of Hizb-i Islami. Latif was acceptable to Junbesh because he had formed relations with the organisation already in Kunduz; however, he proved an exceedingly poor administrator. Under his tenure corruption became a major issue. He was eventually replaced by Abdul Haq Shafaq at the end of 2007. Shafaq enjoyed a reputation of honesty and commitment by Afghan standards, and he earned some popularity by bringing development projects to Faryab, with the collaboration of the Norwegian PRT (established in 2004 by the United Kingdom and taken over in 2005 by Norway). Shafaq also maintained reasonably good relations with Junbesh, avoiding confrontations with it even at the price of leaving obviously ineffective officials in their positions.<sup>22</sup>

Since 2001 there have been four district governors, or *woliswals*, in Dawlatabad District. The first was Commander Abdul Latif from Gorziwan, who had been linked with Commander Habibi, the former ally of Dostum who turned against him. Abdul Latif served in his position from 2001-03. The second *woliswal*, Jan Mohammad, was from a village in Dawlatabad and held the position from 2004 to mid-2007. The third *woliswal* came from Andkhoy and held the position for less than a year before he was removed. The next *woliswal* was reportedly recruited from the office of the Mazar Provincial Governor. The varying stories told about these appointments are revealing of some of the issues underlying respondents' perceptions of district government.<sup>23</sup>

There was general agreement from all sources that Abdul Latif was essentially a commander with powerful external linkages but little respect within the district. This lack of respect may have played a role in getting him removed and the second *woliswal* appointed. As Jan Mohammad noted, when he came into office in 2007 people were armed and many of the old conflicts between the various political parties and their local representatives were still active. However, respondents reported that now these old commanders have either died or left the district, with the exception of Auraz Zabet, as mentioned previously. He was a World Food Programme (WFP) monitoring officer in Dawlatabad, as well as having been charged with providing security for the 2009 elections. He was killed in an armed opposition group attack targeting him on 22 May 2010.

Jan Mohammad seems to have been respected within the district. A respondent from Village C described him as follows:

*He was very cooperative with everyone. I would say if there was a woliswal from our village he would not be as cooperative as Jan Mohammad was. He was an Uzbek himself, but he was acting very well with every tribe as with his own people. This is what people liked about him the most.*

Evidently when he was removed from his post, for reasons that are not clear, a delegation from the district went to the provincial headquarters to have him reinstated, but it was not successful.

The third *woliswal* came from Andkhoy and was apparently a young man without prior experience. The duration of his appointment was short and everyone, including an administrator in Maimana, agreed that he had been relieved of his position because of issues of corruption. A respondent from Village C expressed this as follows:

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22 Giustozzi, interviews with United Nations officials et al; "Winning Hearts and Minds: Examining the Relationship Between Aid and Security in Afghanistan," (Medford, MA, USA: Tufts University, forthcoming).

23 Quotes are taken from key informant interviews conducted in 2008 in initial scene setting work for the study.

*We don't know this current woliswal [the fourth] very well, but we know the last woliswal very well. We remember when the aid was coming for the people, he was first trying to get it for himself. Then if anything was left it went to the people—after all the distribution, the remaining was supposed to be distributed among the people.*

Jan Mohammad himself said, “He was taking bribes from everyone in this area; this is why people complained about him and he was dismissed.”

Interestingly, further discussion regarding the action taken in relation to such complaints about corruption led Jan Mohammad to comment that it might not have been the corruption itself, but more a failure to pass sufficient proceeds further up the line to the provincial level, which was the real issue. He did not state this directly but responded as follows: “When I was *woliswal*, I had a meeting with the provincial authorities and they said, ‘You are doing a good job but you are not looking after your interests.’ And this happened twice.” He went on to say that he had responded that he lived in the district and would have to live in the district after he had finished his service—so how could he take bribes?

The *woliswal* in place in 2008 was reported to have stated publicly that he would not accept bribes and any government official accepting bribes would be removed. This was noted with approval. However, there were hints in Maimana from one non-government Afghan source that he was not seen to be a strong *woliswal*.

This section provided an overview of the complex political context of the province and study district in which study respondents had to act to make a living. It illustrated the political dynamics and changing power-holder allegiances, which resulted in benefits accruing to different aligned groups. (This will become apparent below through the experiences of the different study villages, each with a specific ethnic majority.) It also showed how citizens do not view local government as responsive, and how local leaders who are responsive might be considered weak by those not benefiting, and consequently removed. This all has consequences for how rural residents of Dawlatabad District live their lives, given a political context characterised by change and self-interest. The next section explores the social and economic contexts of the study villages, drawing from the field evidence collected in late 2009.

### **3.2 Village contexts and livelihood trajectories**

Evidence from the interviews and FGDs shows that livelihood security declined since 2002 in all three study villages and for all wealth groups, but to differing degrees based on levels of livelihood resource access. Drought and physical insecurity are the two main drivers for this decline. Respondents reported suffering from two periods of drought since the Taliban came into power in Faryab, with a few years of good rainfall between them (1999-2001 was the first period of drought, 2004-08 the second period). Livelihood insecurity deepened when the effects of drought more recently became combined with the effects of physical insecurity in the district. While the three study villages have taken similar steps to mitigate the effects of these causes of livelihood decline, they succeeded to different degrees. The degree of success depends on the diversity of livelihood resources available in each village and for different households in each village, including social resources that could provide protection during different phases of conflict. This section first briefly describes the three villages’ access to health services, electricity and transport, before describing each village in more detail to provide the context for the discussion of the effects of drought and physical insecurity, and responses to these changes.

All three study villages use an NGO-run health facility, which is located in the southwest of Dawlatabad District Centre. The clinic provides all residents of the area with basic health care services, including maternal health care. The nearest hospitals for the area are in the provincial capital, Maimana, or in Sheberghan or Mazar-i-Sharif. None of the three villages has a market of any kind within it. The nearest market for the three villages is in Dawlatabad town, with Villages A and B closest to it, and Village C being a 30-minute drive away on a gravel road.

For the past year and a half, the three villages have been provided with electricity through NSP funds and local contributions for transformers. This service was not provided simultaneously to the three villages; its delivery depended on the priority given to it within each village and local initiative in raising the funds. Another positive development for the district and study villages is the construction of a paved road between Andkhoy and Maimana, linked to the main ring road. This has dramatically shortened travel time to the north and south. In 2001 the time to travel between Andkhoy and Maimana could be at least six or seven hours depending on the weather. Now the journey can be done in just over two hours. While this provides easier access to provincial government, it is clear that economically it is the access to the north and to Mazar that is more significant.

### ***Village A***

The village is situated some 4 km east of Dawlatabad Centre and is home to around 1,200 households, mainly from the Turkmen ethnic group but including a minority of Uzbek and Arab-origin households. These groups reside in three distinct locations in the village linked to their settlement history. This particular settlement history has allowed the village to claim three NSP-funded CDC *shuras*. At the time of the fieldwork, two were established and one was in the process of being formed. Each of these *shuras* is divided into male and female *shuras*.

Agriculture land-holdings in the village consist of mostly irrigated land; however, rain-fed land-holdings are also considerable. Grain, melon and watermelon are common crops grown in the village. The villagers also possess significant vineyards and other fruit gardens. Owing to its location on the irrigation system (between Village B and Village C, with C being farthest downstream of the canal), the village was able to get some crop output even during periods of drought. For those with no or little land, on-farm labour is a major income source due to the importance of agriculture in the livelihoods of village residents.

The village has a good economic connection with Dawlatabad District Centre, where some of the villagers own shops in the bazaar. This connection with the market has provided opportunity for the villagers not only to expand their livelihood activities, but also to have access to credit.

This village has a reputation for making high-valued carpets, reflecting Turkmen tradition. Women are primarily involved in this work, meaning they play an important role in enabling livelihood diversification. The importance of this role increased when the village faced reduced agriculture output during drought; income from carpet weaving was one way in which the village survived. More will be said about the viability of this occupation when the effects of drought are discussed.

The village has a longer history of investment in education than the other two villages. Indicators for this are the presence of male teachers who graduated from 12th grade many years ago and one resident who obtained a degree in literature and had attended

a training course abroad. The village also has more female teachers than Villages B or C. Some young boys from the village were enrolled in Habibia High School and the military school in Kabul some 40 years ago. More recently, the two *shuras* decided to build a girls' school using NSP funds, whereas the other two villages decided to supply electricity to the villages with the same funds. The reasoning behind this decision is illustrated below through comments shared during an FGD with poorer male residents:

*The local shuras invited the entire members and elders and we discussed with people. We have this situation, what is your idea about it? Then the elders discussed with each other, and afterwards the people agreed and we started to build the girls' school. First we gave the application to the government, but they did not build it yet. Then from the NSP money we built the school. We used the money of both shuras on girls' school and built it. 60,000 dollars was from one shura and 60,000 dollars was from other our shura.*

*The school is better [than electricity] because someone who goes to school can get literacy.*

*I thought if we have a school near to our houses that would be better for us because our females can go to school easily and can learn and they can read and write. The school teaches you how you can live. The illiterate person is blind.*

As a result, the village has two schools now: a secondary school for boys and a primary school for girls. From the data it appears that many children enrol in primary school but drop out in upper grades when their labour is necessary for household survival.

This history of investment in education seems to have led to employment in government offices and to a strengthening of the social profile of the village. There is one male employed in a high position within the irrigation department of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, and two females from the village employed with NGOs as social workers. Moreover, a previous mayor of the district centre was from the village.

The village has also produced some commanders aligned with the government and with the opposition during the Soviet invasion. This has brought some degree of physical and livelihood security for the village. The most recent example of this was the role former commander Auraz Zabet played in providing security for the district election sites during the 2009 presidential election. The presence of this former commander and his militia was also reported to have helped maintain a degree of security in the village in the face of growing insecurity in the district. His recent death may mean increased exposure to security threats.

The village suffered from fighting during the Afghan-Soviet war and during fighting between the mujahiddin and the Soviet-backed government. Specifically, the village experienced substantial decreases in livestock-holdings and incidents of men being disabled from the fighting. However, the Taliban period was the worst time for the village in terms of making a living. Arbitrary behaviour of the Taliban with local residents—including false accusations of owing money, which are illustrated later in the paper—led to loss of livelihood resources.

The combination of political harassment with drought during the Taliban's rule pushed many villagers to flee to Pakistan or Iran. Many young men of the village, particularly those with any link to the mujahiddin, fled the area before the Taliban's arrival. Many households left the village after the Taliban take-over, often travelling individually once

the situation deteriorated so much that their economic survival and physical safety were in doubt. Upon their arrival in Pakistan, these households apparently joined the villagers who left the area before them.

The economic role of women is noticeable in this village not only through the carpet-making skills that the women are known for, but also through women's role in agriculture and the formal employment some women gained with the Department of Education and some NGOs. It was reported in FGDs that women typically move with their families onto agriculture lands during both the cultivating season and harvesting time to assist men in farm labour.

### **Village B**

The second village of the study is located some 5 km south of Dawlatabad. It is home to around 800 households, the majority of which are from the Uzbek ethnic group and with a minority of Turkmen, Arab and Pashtun households. Pashtun residents have been living in a separate community from the main village area, while the other ethnic groups have been living together. The village is therefore administered by two CDC *shuras*, one for each part of the village, each with male and female representatives.

This village is similar to Village A in terms of natural resource availability. Irrigated agriculture, fruit gardening and on-farm labour are the main income-generating activities for the village, in addition to considerable rain-fed agriculture. The irrigated land-holdings of the village are less than in Village A but still more than in Village C. Irrigation water access is more reliable for this village due to the existence of a *band* [dam] near the village from where water flows to Village B and then on to Villages A and C. Remittances from labour migrants and carpet weaving also provide income to villagers and become more important during drought.

Evidence from the respondent households seems to indicate that the wealth distribution is widely unequal in this village, perhaps more so than in the other villages. There are some wealthy households that have been able to supply modern farming inputs, such as tractors and threshers, for both personal and public use on credit, besides owning public transportation vehicles used between Mazar-i-Sharif, Maimana and the district centre. Other households are unable to afford even their daily needs. This group of households is largely dependent on credit and community assistance to survive.

The village benefits from one secondary school in which girls study from morning until midday and boys after midday; both groups are taught mostly by male teachers. Reportedly girls often drop out of school at secondary level due to the social norms of the community. Some boys are able to continue their education, but many also drop out due to the need to work. Some also leave school because of the lack of qualified teachers for the higher grades. Some wealthy households have been able to afford to send their male children to Sheberghan, Maimana or Mazar-i-Sharif for education.

Besides this formal school, there is a madrassa at which some boys from the village and neighbouring villages have been studying. Some students gained scholar residency in madrassas in Pakistan over the last decade through their association with this madrassa. Some of these students then spoke out against the government and international community and in support of the Taliban upon their return. Some now blame these former madrassa students for making the village and surrounding area insecure. The village currently suffers from a degree of insecurity, particularly during nights when unknown men enter on motorcycles, "like wolves attack sheep," as one female FGD

participant stated. Several armed clashes between anti-government elements and the police have occurred in the village vicinity, preventing the villagers from moving to their land during some crucial times in the agriculture season. Family ties with anti-government elements<sup>24</sup> have also led to some village members being charged with supporting and having connections with insurgents; villagers perceive these charges to be false, leading to dissatisfaction with the district government. One example, given by the *arbab* (a traditional village leader) and deputy *arbab*, was the arrest of the village *mullah* due to police suspicions that he was linked to the Taliban. Village elders protested his innocence and went to the district governor, successfully securing his release.

This instability in the security environment affects women's social life and income-generating activities. They no longer dare to move to agriculture lands along with their families, and families have restricted girls' school attendance.

Again similar to Village A, the Taliban period was the most difficult in terms of availability of livelihood resources for Village B. Resources had already been affected during the previous decades of conflict, and this decline continued until villagers experienced some recovery due to years of good rainfall in the early years of the Karzai government. During the Taliban time respondents reported that villagers migrated to both Pakistan and Iran, both as individuals and as whole households.

### **Village C**

Village C is situated about 6 km northwest of Dawlatabad Centre. The village is home to 900 Pashtun households. Having only one NSP-funded CDC *shura* for this relatively large village has raised concerns within the village about discrimination. Residents submitted a proposal to establish a second *shura*, and this was under review in late-2009. Reportedly women are not active in the existing *shura* due to social norms of the village, which restrict women's and girls' public presence.

The significant livelihood activities in this village are rain-fed agriculture and livestock. However, the village has access to some irrigated agriculture land and vineyards, made possible through the use of water-lifting pumps from the irrigation canal. These pumps have been in place since the Taliban period and are used in breach of established water-sharing agreements. Among the three villages, Village C is located farthest downstream. Its irrigated land-holdings are reportedly less than the other two villages<sup>25</sup> and are located farther outside the village. Village C's ground water resources are poor quality, being salty and non-potable.

Livestock rearing is an important livelihood activity in Village C, due to its poorer land and irrigation water assets. It is present but less important in Villages A and B. For Village A, in particular, livestock is mainly a source of materials for carpet making. A key issue in respect to maintenance of livestock herds is access to pasture. Village C reported that its access to pasture areas, to which it has had claim since its residents settled in the area, has become restricted. In the view of respondents from Villages A and B, these pasture areas are government land which anyone can use. In fact, access to pasture has been deeply impacted by changes in political power and the security environment over recent decades—a subject that will be explored in detail later in this paper.

<sup>24</sup> In an interview with the *arbab* and deputy *arbab*, it was reported that six men in the village had relations with the Taliban.

<sup>25</sup> Village A has five *paykals* of irrigated land; Village B has four, and Village C is reported to share five with another village. However, another report says it has five to itself. A *paykal* is a measure for irrigated land; one *paykal* covers 500 *jeribs* of land.

Village C shares a primary school with a neighbouring Uzbek village. Only boys study there. Girls are not allowed to attend school due to restrictions on movement and gendered expectations related to girls' need for education. The village has the poorest educational profile among the three villages, with only a few cases of educated men. Women play a significant role in the village economy through livestock rearing and related businesses such as producing dairy products and making low-valued *gelim* and *palas* (two types of flat, woven carpet with a simple pattern). However, they have few other livelihood options and are restricted regarding involvement with the *shura* and the activities it carries out.

The Taliban period was not as politically difficult for this village. Instead, the time of the mujahiddin, and particularly Rasul Pahlawan's rule, was the most restricted time according to respondents' descriptions. Besides destruction of their houses, the villagers reported losing a large part of their livestock-holdings during the time Rasul Pahlawan was in power in Faryab. This was due to the Pahlawan's negative attitude toward the Pashtun ethnic group, reflecting a long-standing history of intra-ethnic conflicts in the province. Because of these difficulties, residents of Village C became internally displaced to a border area with Turkmenistan in Herat Province, where they stayed until 1998, when the Taliban captured the area.



## 4. Drivers of Declining Livelihood Security

This section explores the effects of the political instability and rising insecurity described in Section 3 on life in the study villages; the villages are compared in order to illustrate their different experiences linked to their allegiances and ethnic ties. It then discusses the effects of drought on livelihoods—particularly on agriculture, livestock and carpet weaving.

### 4.1 Political power dynamics and insecurity

Many changes in the political environment took place over the last three decades in the study district. These changes affected the livelihoods of the study village residents, either negatively or positively, depending on who was in power, his allegiances and the ethnic composition of the village. The three villages suffered during different periods from declining livestock numbers, due to loss of grazing rights and pre-migration asset sales, and had to cope with taxation, as well as recruitment of able-bodied men to fight in support of different commanders in power during different phases of the conflict. Conscription left a number of physically disabled male heads of households. Changes in the political power environment enhanced access to natural resources for some of villages, with the scope and distribution of these changes informed by the political interests and ethnic concerns of the power holders at the time. This section looks chronologically at three periods of change in political power and their effects on livelihoods in the three villages.

#### 1978-98

During this period the villages were controlled by local commanders, whose attachments to different political parties and alignment with key political power holders in the area directly affected livelihoods in the villages. While political alignment with these key power holders brought a degree of security and, at times, positive consequences in terms of access to livelihood resources, political opposition or ethnic differences brought negative responses.

From 1978-88 the Soviet-backed government controlled Dawlatabad town and its vicinity, while the different mujahiddin political parties controlled rural areas including the three villages. Village A was controlled by a commander with Hezb-i Islami (Auraz Zabet), while a commander with Harakat-i Enqlab-i Islami controlled Village C. Political frictions between these local commanders led to fighting between them, during which some villagers from Village C were killed. This fighting made the commander of Village A into a key figure in the area.

As mentioned previously, Rasul Pahlawan—who held the province from 1988 until he was assassinated in 1996—forced his own plan for access to natural resources on the residents of the district, reflecting long-standing ethnic conflicts. He restricted Pashtun access to pastures, converted pastures to agriculture land and distributed them among his allies. Respondents from Village C reported that this negatively affected their livelihoods because residents lost access to pastures that belonged to them from many years ago. In addition, the village suffered from a significant decrease in livestock numbers when many livestock owned by villagers were reportedly taken away by Rasul Pahlawan's militia after three days of fighting with the Village C commander. The quotes below from respondents in Village C illustrate their perspectives on what happened in their village during this period:

*After the Najeeb government collapsed and the mujahiddin came to power, people got in the tribal conflict. Rasul Pahlawan was in power and he was saying you were Pashtun, you were Uzbek and you were Turkmen. I left my land and migrated. Rasul Palawan ate my vineyard [its product] for 18 years.— Male respondent, Household C43*

*Before the Taliban, in the past, I had many livestock and some camels. When I came back during the Taliban from Torghondy I used to work as a mason, our females were weaving gelims. Then an Uzbek took our land, and now the land is under his hand and he cultivated that land. I went to the district office and provincial office, but they said those lands that Rasul Pahlawan distributed to people are legal so that I left it to that Uzbek.—Male respondent, Household C56*

*When Rasul Pahlawan came to power they started fighting against Pashtun people. They were taking their livestock and looting their houses. The reason for the fighting was against the settlement of Pashtun people in their area. In one day Rasul Pahlawan took 80,000 goats and sheep from Pashtun people.— Former commander, Village C*

These restrictions on residents of Village C and their loss of livelihood assets led to mass displacement from this village to Torghondy, whereas Villages A and B gained security by paying Rasul Pahlawan tax on their land and supplying his militia with fighters and food. This gain in security came at a cost to livelihoods in Villages A and B, but they could accommodate the loss of food stocks and crops mainly due to having good agriculture output resulting from good rainfall and the continued provision of security, as the statement below shows:

*In that time Rasul Pahlawan was taking one-fourth from our harvest and now we are paying about one-tenth. When Rasul Pahlawan was in power, he was taking zakat [a small percentage of properties, typically given as charity] from the people, about one-fourth...It is true that he divided your harvest in four parts and the one part of your harvest was his forces' right, but there was bounty. We used to get good harvest from our lands, but now we don't pay, but we do not have good harvest.—Male participants in FGD with wealthier respondents, Village B*

### **1998-2001**

During this time the Taliban was in power in the area, and the situation turned in favour of Village C in terms of access to political power. Village C residents returned to the village from Torghondy and started rebuilding their houses, apparently from savings earned in displacement. This building boom benefited some households whose members had relevant skills. For example, the male head of Household C56 reportedly secured off-farm labour as a mason during this time. In addition, the village regained access to pastures from which they had been deprived under Rasul Pahlawan and set up a water-lifting pump from the irrigation canal. This allowed them to turn rain-fed lands into irrigated lands. However, the prosperity did not last long because of the onset of drought.

In contrast, livelihood security declined in Villages A and B during this time.<sup>26</sup> Respondents from Villages A and B recalled it as “the time of poverty” and “roz-i-sia [dark days]”

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<sup>26</sup> Presumably the decline in livelihood security was more severe for the majority Uzbek and other non-Pashtun groups in Village B. However, the field teams did not investigate this in depth.

because of both the changed political environment, in which these villages' access to power was lost, and the onset of drought. Respondents from both villages reported similar experiences of harassment by Taliban—often labelled “local Taliban”—bent, in the respondents' views, on revenge for past injustices under the Pahlawan's rule. One of these stories is illustrated below. Other stories were similar and also recounted relying on social connections to escape from the accusations made.

*There was much conflict during the Taliban. I want to say a story from Taliban time about what happened to me. One day I was going home and on the way one Pashtun guy came and stood in my way, and said, 'I was searching for you in the sky, but I find you on ground.' I said, 'Why? Do I know who you are?' He said, 'I am the person that you have borrowed money from—one daaman qajra [meaning a lap-full of silver coin; specifying a large debt].' Then he took me to the governor's office and then he said to other Taliban that I am his debtor and they beat me. There was a person by the name of Haji Sahib who was the head of Taliban in the district. Haji Sahib was my friend during the Najeeb government, so when I saw him I recognised him, and I said to him, 'I am Amanullah, your friend who used to work with you.' Just afterward he recognised me and then he said to other Taliban, 'He is not that person that you are thinking about,' and then he released me.—Respondent from FGD with poorer men in Village A<sup>27</sup>*

Respondents reported that, in the end, drought combined with Taliban harassment led many villagers in Villages A and B to leave, mostly for Pakistan. This movement was neither pre-arranged nor organised under the leadership of one particular person, due to the control imposed by the Taliban local government. Respondents from Village A in particular reported how individuals or households who wanted to migrate either came up with an excuse, such as a need to get medical treatment or to visit a relative somewhere else, or simply left the village during the night without sharing their plans even with close relatives or friends.

*During the night we were sleeping in our houses and in the morning we were hearing that ten people went to Pakistan, 15 people went to Pakistan. Migration to Iran and Pakistan became very common. And people used to go individually with their family, not together with each other...Those who wanted to go somewhere, some of those who wanted to take their families out from under the control of the Taliban, they used to make excuses like, 'We are going to the doctor in Sheberghan; we are going to some relative's house outside the village.' In these ways people were escaping the Taliban.—Male FGD participant, Village A*

Interestingly, the respondents reported that life abroad led to some changes in gender norms, especially in Village A in relation to carpet weaving. This had been a gender-based activity in which girls and women wove the carpets, while men were involved in setting up the carpet loom and trading the woven carpets. However, migration changed this arrangement. Many men started weaving, as it was one of the only means of survival during displacement in Pakistan, and some continued this work after returning to Afghanistan, though it remains a predominantly female activity.

Inter-village relationships were impacted negatively during this time because of the arbitrary attitude of the Taliban toward the local residents. While Village C welcomed the Taliban arrival, many residents in Villages A and B, in fear for their survival at the

<sup>27</sup> All names of respondents are pseudonyms.

point when the Taliban first took over, sought refuge in Village C. However, respondents reported that they did not feel welcome or protected. One female FGD participant in Village B recounted expectations of protection that were not met, as neighbours did not protect a group of young men from Village B who were subsequently killed by the Taliban. This led to some hardening of relations. Another significant change affecting inter-village relations was from the previously reported accusations of wrong-doing made by “local Taliban” against those from other ethnic groups. These accusations against residents of Villages A and B several times ended with them losing physical assets such as livestock or cash. The statement below shows how respondents linked these negative actions to locals and not Pashtuns from outside the district:

*They did not have good behaviour with Turkmen and Uzbek people. They had good behaviour with Pashtun people. Local Pashtun people were making problems. The Taliban who came from Kandahar had good behaviour and the local people had bad behaviour, in order to take their revenge.—Male FGD participant, Village A*

When the Taliban collapsed in 2001, the elders of Pashtun Village C approached the elders from Village B to apologise for what took place during the Taliban’s rule and asked them to ensure the same actions were not repeated. Reportedly such reverse hostilities did not take place, mainly due to the elders’ interventions to maintain peace, illustrating the strong role of village authority structures in peace building. As one male respondent from Village B described:

*Our elders said that these people have done bad behaviour with us; if we do the same things to them, then what is the difference between them and us? After the Taliban we did not have any revenge on anyone, even with those who escaped and came back to the village later. We do not have any fight in the village.*

However, some respondents reported that villagers who were involved with the Taliban from Villages B and C fled the area due to fear of revenge actions.

As noted in the introduction to this section, perspectives and experiences of these different phases of the conflict varied by ethnic group. This is clear from the quotes in Box 1, which describe respondents’ experiences of different time periods and when they experienced a “good life.” Respondents from Villages A and B reported reduced ability to move to pasture or cultivated land and loss of livelihood assets, as seen in some quotes below. The arbab and deputy arbab of Village B also reported residents having to pay 150,000 Afs (approximately 1,000 Afs in current currency) or send someone to fight for the Taliban, even though some respondents from Village C said the Taliban did not forcibly conscript. These two leaders from Village B also reported that residents had to pay *ushr* (one-tenth of land productions, typically give as charity) on land and property to the Taliban. These factors resulted in significant livelihood effects. The insecurity and reduced mobility led Household B29, from the wealthier respondent group from Village B, to reconsider its investment in livestock. Prior to the Taliban’s take-over of the area, it owned a flock of some 200 sheep and goats, as well as irrigated and rain-fed land. The head of the household sold the entire herd after deciding that keeping the flock was too risky. The Taliban’s rule meant no one could take the flock to the desert to graze, and he had often had to give up animals in the face of multiple manufactured, politically-based disputes. The decision was made after careful discussion within the household to buy a tractor as a more secure asset than livestock. As will be seen later, this decision, while motivated by the physical insecurity during this period, led to stable if not improving livelihood security for HHB29 after the drought period. Others lost

livestock while fleeing the Taliban. One female respondent in a focus group with women from Village A recounted what happened when her family fled:

*Many livestock died. Some of them were taken and slaughtered by the Taliban. Some of them which were left for us died when we could not feed them. How could we afford their fodder when we could not survive?*

**Box 1: Perspectives on phases of the conflict**

*I know that Rasul Pahlawan teased them [Pashtuns] very much. He was a cruel man and harmed everyone, not only them. I know he forced them to send their boys to serve in the war and plundered their sheep and livestock. Local Pashtuns then might only want to take revenge because they told us that Rasul Pahlawan was also an Uzbek. They cheered that it was their day when the Taliban appeared.—Female FGD participant, Village B*

*The story of Taliban is too long. The people were constrained by the Taliban. Coming of Taliban was ‘drought fortune’ for people because during Taliban time people had very bad drought. They were suffering from drought. The people could not work on their land. On the way the Taliban were taking the people’s donkeys by force, their harvests and their bread. We had finished our livestock, our lives were finished and the people were in trouble.—Male FGD participant, Village B*

*The Taliban were good people. They did not take any person for becoming a soldier. They did not force Pashtuns and Uzbeks to become soldiers. Some Taliban abused the Taliban name. There were difficulties during the Taliban. We did not have electricity and good roads. During the Taliban there was drought. They had nothing to help the people. There was no work.—Male FGD participant, Village C*

*If we go to the desert [now] we are being looted, but during the Taliban we could go to the desert and other places without fear.—Male FGD participant, Village C*

*Before the Taliban’s coming to Dawlatabad, people’s lives were good, and all people were busy with their businesses, and we were happy at that time. And when the Taliban came all things got worse; the Taliban smashed and used to hit people.—Male FGD participant, Village A*

*They [the Taliban] did not have good behaviour with people; people could not go out from their homes.—Male FGD participant, Village A*

**2001-10**

After the fall of the Taliban came approximately six years of relative stability in the political and security environment. Since 2007, however, insecurity has been growing in the three villages. Evidence of this rising insecurity includes occasions of villagers coming across armed groups outside of the villages who demanded personal belongings and taxes on land and property. Moreover, some armed clashes took place around Villages B and C

during attempts by armed anti-government elements to enter the villages. Village A has been able to maintain better security inside the village due to the presence of former commander Auraz Zabet.

*They [Taliban] are coming to villages also during the night. Most of the time they come to [Village C]...But they do not come to [Village A], because Auraz Zabet has taken guns and the Taliban are afraid of him.—Male FGD participant, Village A*

Auraz Zabet was the monitoring officer for WFP in Dawlatabad. This role, along with his reputation as leader of the local *arbaki* (see Section 5.1), extended Village A's social network. It provided a degree of livelihood security through increased labour availability, if only seasonally, as this former commander implemented food for work programmes in the district in cooperation with village CDC *shuras*. His recent killing will change these social connections, with potentially negative effects for the village.

Rising insecurity in Dawlatabad District has affected some economic activities, the social life of women and the implementation of development programmes in the villages. It also means that any government or NGO linkage is now a concern, particularly for women, as they fear being targeted by the insurgent groups infiltrating the district. Access to agriculture lands—especially rain-fed lands located away from the villages—to pastures and to hills where firewood is collected has become more limited now, due to the risks of coming across the armed groups. Respondents from Villages A and B particularly reported this, though the former commander from Village C noted people cannot work easily. He also reported that the insurgents are demanding payment of *ushr* and *zakat*.

Though male villagers have been able to reduce risk by travelling jointly and working on lands only during daylight, female villagers report no longer being able to move onto the land in order to assist in agriculture activities. Household B29, which invested in a tractor in place of owning livestock during the Taliban's rule, now reports declining income because the head of the household will not let his sons plough desert lands due to insecurity. Other reports of how the insurgent infiltration affects livelihoods are shown below:

*Before, people were going to the desert and bringing dung from the desert. They were selling this dung and earned about 200 Afs per day, and they passed their life. But now people cannot go to the desert to bring some dung for the house and selling because of insecurity.—Participant in male FGD with poorer residents, Village A*

*Villagers can't go to the desert to reap their wheat freely. It was the time of reaping though. The men did not leave the village or nearby farm for a while. Right now they fear going out of the village, especially alone. Once, in last summer my own son left for the desert to reap wheat. He came back soon, frightened, and informed us that fighting was happening between the Taliban and police there.—Participant in female FGD, Village A*

*This year during the spring people could not go to the desert for their harvest, because of Taliban in the desert.—Participant in male FGD with wealthy respondents, Village B*

These access issues are variable. While the spring was generally reported to be a bad period, when movement to lands was highly restricted, some reported that conditions

at the time of the interviews (November 2009) were better, due to the killing of some Taliban and the presence of the local militia. However, some men still stated they would not go to the desert area.

For Village C, the consequences of the current security environment are serious, as local residents and the district officials blame Pashtuns for the deteriorating situation. The village has to cope with the same livelihood effects of insecurity as the other two villages, as well as these ethnicity-based prejudices. As a result, the male villagers no longer dare to travel to their distant lands by driving motorcycles in a group. They are considered a threat and risk being arrested or shot at since the insurgents also ride motorbikes in groups. Respondents from Village C also reported arbitrary arrests. For example, one male FGD participant said, “The government arrested one of our young boys from the village because he was a Talib. But some months before he came from Iran.” The village elders expressed discontent about the provincial government’s initiative to launch regular meetings with Pashtun community elders in order to increase government outreach as a means to increase stability. The elders were concerned with the targeting of Pashtuns for this outreach. They expressed clearly that elders from other ethnic groups should be engaged too because insecurity has no ethnic roots.

Another way the current insecure environment is affecting Village C more intensely—because of the higher degree of insecurity in that location—is through a decline in the number of development programmes being implemented. Specifically, a new bridge is needed to facilitate access to a school and clinic shared with another village. However, there is some conflict about where the bridge should be built, as well as long-standing conflict between the villages related to access to agriculture and pasture lands. The bridge project ended up being postponed indefinitely because of an incident when engineers visited to assess the project. Village C residents blame the other villages for starting a rumour of Taliban presence in Village C and scaring the engineers away by having a group approach them on motorbikes.

This section illustrated in some detail the varied political and economic fortunes of the villages across the different phases of conflict and in the years since the transitional government came to power. Section 5 will describe the often limited responses of the villages to the recent insecurity that attempt to mitigate the effects.

## 4.2 Drought

Since 1998, two periods of drought have been reported in the area where the three study villages are located. However, there are reports of further natural disasters prior to this time, such as other periods of drought, hard winters and, in particular, a widespread outbreak of animal disease. The research team focused primarily on the effects of the droughts since 1998. The first one lasted for three years, from 1999-2001, and the second lasted from 2004-08, with two years of good rainfall between the two periods. Winter snowfall and rains in 2002-03 offered some an opportunity for livelihood recovery; one villager in Village A recalled being able to buy several cars in 2004, seemingly as a result of a good poppy crop. The first period of drought hit the livelihoods of residents in Villages A and B strongly, in part because it was combined with the effects of political instability and exclusion. They were taxed on their land production and forced to supply Taliban food demands. However, the second period exhausted the villages’ livelihood resources because of its longer duration. Drought effects were noticeable across the three villages and across wealth groups, as the statement “no longer having *bai* [wealthy] people within the villages” was heard frequently during the data collection period. Drought had multiple and compound

effects on the villagers' livelihoods, although to varying degrees for each village based on their livelihood resource portfolios. This section looks at these effects in more detail.

### ***Agriculture***

Land-owning became a burden during the drought years, as a landless villager in Village C expressed: "Thanks Almighty Allah! I had neither irrigated land nor rain-fed." Agriculture was affected severely by drought, but the effects differed between the villages, reflecting the size and type of agriculture land held in each village. The impact of drought on irrigated agriculture land was not as severe as on rain-fed agriculture land, so Village C was affected more severely, as it had a higher percentage of rain-fed land than the other villages. Although the irrigation system was impacted by prolonged drought, it still was able to provide some irrigation water in the three villages at a lower flow rate. Therefore it allowed the villages to get some harvest from irrigated land over the years of drought, whereas rain-fed lands completely failed to produce any crop. As some of the villagers in Village C stated, they could not get even "a fist of straw" from the land. Landless respondents reported not finding agriculture work or other skilled or unskilled work during the drought. They sold livestock, if they had it, to survive, wove carpets and reduced consumption.

For those with land, poor harvests meant inputs for the next season, particularly seeds for cultivation, could not be stocked from their own production at the same level as in good years. One study household in Village C reported high levels of debt when it failed to harvest even seeds for three continuous years. Those without the means to access seeds reportedly left lands uncultivated for two to three years. A good year in terms of rainfall did not necessarily mean a good agriculture year to households whose resources were already exhausted by persistent drought. Many could not afford agriculture inputs in early 2009 in response to good rains; others, particularly from Village C, did not risk cultivating their land for fear of another year of drought.

In addition to these direct impacts of drought on agriculture, several indirect consequences of drought were noticed in the three villages during the data collection period. Drought, coupled with regional market constraints in the second drought period and currency devaluation in the first, led to increases in food prices in local markets. While irrigated lands were able to produce some grain during the years of drought, as noted above, it was not enough to meet household consumption needs even for households achieving grain self-sufficiency prior to the drought. This led to increased dependency on markets for food, which in turn supported increases in food prices in local markets, due to higher demand and limited supplies locally and regionally.

In response to drought and limited ability to purchase food staples, some households increased their reliance on marginal livelihood activities, such as bush and mushroom collecting, to survive. Growing physical insecurity later in the second drought period made these activities increasingly risky, limiting the diversification ability of poor households. In response to global food price increases in 2008, which reduced access to grain from regional markets and compounded the problem of lack of local grain supply, households reportedly reduced food consumption and, in several cases from Village A, sold agriculture land to supply the food staples of the households. These tended to be distress sales, at lower prices than the pre-drought market price.

The drought brought some ill-health consequences too, as it affected more than irrigation water supplies. Poor rainfall depleted ground water resources, particularly in Village C,



which already had lower water resources compared with the two other villages. This led to low supply and reduced quality of drinking water, which in turn led to use of unsafe water and increased the burden of ill-health costs on household livelihoods.

Two steps were taken at the time to lessen the drought effects. One was distribution of improved seeds by NGOs when the villages failed to produce enough seeds. The other was cultivation of poppy, since it can better adjust to lack of water. These two steps, however, were not without problems. Improved wheat seeds distributed to the villages did not fit well into the local agriculture system. They often required more water than local conditions allowed, and in the good rain year of 2009 the seeds reportedly produced wheat infected with wheat rust in Village A, reducing agriculture outcomes. Therefore the aid provided did not improve livelihood security or support recovery.

Evidence of poppy cultivation during the late-1990s and early-2000s emerged largely from respondents in Village B. Drought-related failure of the traditional cereal-based agriculture system during the Taliban period made the villagers turn to a substitute crop. Not surprisingly, this crop was opium poppy, which villagers from Village B reportedly cultivated for five years, beginning late in the Taliban period. The poppy crop provided considerable cash income, and the village prospered. Landowners were able to accumulate more assets like vehicles, while landless villagers benefited from the greater availability of on-farm labour opportunities and higher wage rates of 300-400 Afs per day. Interestingly, this time of prosperity had disadvantages due to low supply of own-grown cereal crops and other basic staples. Respondents related concerns over supplying food essentials for their households because of high prices of food staples in markets. As a woman from Village B stated:

*When we would cultivate poppy, although the poppy could be sold at a high price, the money we paid for food items like wheat also was very high because we did not get any crop from our land, and we had to buy all our wheat needs from the bazaar, plus other food.*

### **Livestock**

Having been hit already by political instability, the livestock herds of the three villages were further reduced by drought. The impact of livestock reduction was greater on Village C, where the village economy is more centred on livestock and its products than in Villages A and B; however, these two villages also suffered. Struggling to survive during drought, many households had no choice but to sell livelihood assets. Livestock was often the first type of asset to be sold, as this male FGD participant from Village B related, describing how he coped with drought: “We lost all our livestock. We sold it and bought food for our homes.”

Similarly, Household B34 related selling livestock to survive the drought during Taliban years:

*We had nothing to eat. We had no savings. We sold our livestock to survive our life. During that time, we sold two cows and 40 goats and sheep and passed our life. Forty goats and sheep we sold in the first and second year of the Taliban.*

Livestock sales were at times driven by rising costs of rearing the animals, related to rising fodder prices as well as lack of access to pastures. For example, this female FGD participant from Village A reported how she sold livestock when fodder prices rose:

Question: *So what did you do when you struggled to find fodder for your animals?*

Answer: *I sold them off for 1,000 Afs, for example, but now the price of the same sheep is 5,000 Afs. However, nobody bought livestock at that time.*

Poorer families reported resorting to livestock sales early in the drought, while wealthier households took other steps first, often using household savings like women's jewellery or selling other household goods that were not as productive as livestock, such as a car. Households were emotionally distressed when they had to sell livestock because they felt they might never be able to recover the lost herds. Respondents also acknowledged that the cash from livestock sales would not meet their basic needs. For example, a villager from Village C stated:

*...There was drought. I had three calves. I sold one of them for 1,200,000 Junbesh currencies [800 Afs], the second one for 800,000 Junbesh currencies [533 Afs] and the third one for 400,000 [266 Afs]. If you sell your cow for 1,200,000 Junbesh currencies, how you can survive your life?*

This also highlights the rapid decline in livestock prices as distress sales flooded the market.

Household B29, mentioned previously for its decision to sell its livestock during the Taliban period and invest in a tractor, benefited from this decision in the post-drought period. This strategic choice put the household on a stable, if not upward, trajectory, as the village lacked draught power after the drought due to sale of animals. This placed the tractor in high demand. Moreover, the strategy assisted the household to accumulate other assets, including a new herd of livestock and transportation vehicles—the latter made possible when the sons reached working age. As the head of the household said:

*The income from the tractor has been enough for a year of my household expenditures. When I earned enough money from the tractor I bought a Townace [Toyota Townace] car. After one or two years I sold the Townace and bought a Saracha [Toyota Station Wagon]. Two of my sons now are farmers, the third one is working with the tractor and the fourth one is driving a public transportation vehicle between Mazar-e-Sharif and Maimana. This year I bought a threshing machine. Now there are no ploughing oxen in the village so that...for all the Jawza month my sons were working with the threshing machine.*

For those unable to afford to hire a tractor or who own smaller parcels of agriculture lands, the decline in number of draught animals required decisions about how to cultivate the land—through hired labour or hiring the tractor. Often the latter option required credit arrangements, with the landowner paying for the tractor's use after harvest. This increased risks related to drought because if the crop failed, the debt accumulated.

Women contributed to household livelihoods through livestock rearing and livestock products. This activity seemed more common for women in Village C, due to both the importance of livestock to livelihoods in Village C and the village's more conservative social norms, which made home-based livestock activities appropriate for women. However, drought affected the income women could earn from the sale of dairy products as livestock herds declined and fodder prices rose. This meant the health of remaining animals was often compromised through less or lower quality fodder, affecting milk output.

Declining livestock herds deepened concerns about the quality of food intake in households, with quality already reduced by the decline in agriculture outcomes. As an FGD participant from Village B stated, “Some people could not see meat even in dreams, and some people did not feed their families but only with bread.” This had clear consequences for nutritional and health status of family members, as well as ramifications for the ability of households to recover from drought in the short- and long-term, due to the resulting weakening of human resources.

Another wider consequence of the decline in livestock in the three villages was the declining availability of local wool, which was used as material for making carpets. This loss considerably changed the local carpet market, with these changes starting as early as 1971. The following section describes the consequences for the local carpet market

### ***Carpet weaving***

The recent droughts, in combination with political changes and shifts in the global economy, affected the carpet market in Afghanistan and the study district, continuing the decline in the carpet market originating during the drought of 1971. The recent droughts directly affected the quality and quantity of carpet inputs, particularly the availability and quality of wool. The reduced availability of wool from weavers’ own sources led to further restructuring of carpet-producing arrangements; weavers went from being independent producers to dependent suppliers of labour inputs for piece-rate payments. The effects of the wider economic downturn on the international carpet market, and recent development programmes implemented in the three villages such as girls’ education, also impacted the local carpet market.

Gradual reduction of livestock herds in the three villages over recent decades resulted in the disappearance of local wool, which had formerly contributed to the production of high quality and durable carpets with low input costs for weavers. Village A suffered most from this decline, due to its stronger tradition of carpet weaving. When producers could supply their own wool, a circumstance most common prior to the Soviet invasion, carpet production processes were long and complex—starting with shearing and cleaning the fleece, then spinning the wool and dyeing the yarn, before setting up the loom for weaving. Depending on the labour available and the type and size of the carpet, weaving took anywhere from several weeks to several months. Families sold their own carpets in the local market, with the prices received depending on the bargaining skills of the male sellers. This long process meant a particular household could weave few carpets during a year; however, sale prices reflected the high quality and the total return went to the producers. For households unable to provide their own wool at that time, there were many local *bais* in the villages, especially in Village A, who provided the materials and then only took the cost of materials from the final sale price; this provided the weavers with a higher share of the return than they receive at present. Carpet producers could also purchase inputs on credit from the local bazaar if they could not afford to buy in cash, repaying the debt once the carpet was sold.

However, once local wool became less available, these arrangements changed and became less favourable to the weavers. Carpet weavers began to use imported wool, which was lower in quality, mixing natural and synthetic materials. These changes, and particularly the inability of many weaving households to afford to purchase inputs, led to an increasing role for Andkhoy-based carpet traders who had local agents in Villages A and B. These new arrangements affected *qalin* weaving, and therefore they mainly impacted carpet production and returns in Villages A and B. The arrangements for *gillim* and *palas*, made in Village C, did not change as much, notwithstanding the

shortage of wool. Instead it seems that the number of weavers of *gillim* and *palas* decreased over the years in response to the shortage of wool. Respondents viewed these market changes negatively because they lost independence, as is reflected in the comments below from an FGD with poor men in Village A:

*People first used to spin wool, and they were selling it in the bazaar. In that time every person could sell and buy qalin by their choice because we used to take the material from our own livestock in the village and could sell it anywhere that we wanted. But now just bais' representatives come and buy wool and thread from the bazaar, and no one can buy anything. Poor people cannot buy any carpet material; just the bai can buy the materials. First the bazaar was free for all people and everyone could take and sell their carpets in the bazaar, but now no one can do it because bais' representatives are doing everything.*

*Before in the village we had a free bazaar, so everywhere we could sell carpets and that was useful for us. But now it is something like a monopoly on our carpet weaving, and this method is not useful for us. This just makes benefits for bais.*

The new arrangements for weaving *qalin* led to fifty-fifty sharing between the trader and the weaver of a pre-established value for each square metre of woven carpet.<sup>28</sup> The trader now provides all material for the carpet, from design to the yarn, which has been weighed carefully before delivery to the weaver; he also oversees the weaving process through agents present in the village. Then, when the weaver finishes a carpet the agent again weighs it and checks the carpet in terms of fineness of weaving and correctness of the pattern. If the weight does not match the weight of yarn provided, the weaver loses 350 Afs for each kilo reduction in the weight. Agents also fine the weavers if the pattern and final quality of the carpet are not satisfactory. The data suggest the value of a square metre of carpet is fixed at US\$50, meaning that the price of a 12 square metre carpet is US\$600, from which the share of the weaver would not be more than US\$300, and could be less if the weaving does not satisfy the agent. A carpet might take up to six months to weave, depending on the number of weavers available in a household. However, one key informant shared his understanding that while the weaver gets 50 percent of the pre-established price of the carpet, the final price at which the carpet is sold might be much higher than this fixed price.

Respondents reported that weavers can be paid in advance. In this way, poorer weaving households are able to survive during the time the carpet is woven. A male respondent from Household A01 reported the help that representatives provide through advances: "During the carpet weaving the representative also helps the people, like he helps them with some flour, cooking oil and other things. When he pays for the carpet he counts and deducts the expenses that he spent on the carpet weaver [from the final payment]."

Theoretically these arrangements could benefit the weavers, if they resulted in certainty of carpet orders and income. However, in reality it does not work this way. The recent international economic crisis has reduced the carpet trade. The effects are felt throughout the carpet-producing industry, including in the study villages, with the weavers reporting lower incomes due to declining orders. Villagers in Villages A and B reported that insecurity along the trading routes of the northern Afghanistan carpet industry—which historically run from Andkhoy to Kabul and from there to Pakistan,

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<sup>28</sup> The fifty-fifty share was reported to be for *qalin* of four square metres and higher. The split for smaller *qalins* was reported as 40 percent for the weaver and 60 percent for the trader.

importing material and exporting the woven carpet—also affected the carpet market and reduced carpet trading.

*I have been weaving carpet since I remember. It is difficult work with little money. Before it was good, but now the money we get from it has come down... It needs a lot of labour but makes little money. Four to five years ago it was good that we could make \$300 for weaving four-metre carpet, but now it is less, \$100.—Female FGD participant, Village B*

*The carpet market decreased; no one buys carpets. Some days before I took my carpet to market, but no one wanted to buy it. Finally I sold it, and I received 2,000 Afs.—Male respondent, Household B21*

Drought clearly had deep effects on the primary livelihood activities in the study villages, with these negative effects compounded by political instability and rising insecurity. The next section describes how residents in the study villages responded to these changing conditions, attempting to mitigate the effects. Most had few ways to cope effectively with the rising insecurity, but had more options to respond to drought. These included labour migration, a historic livelihood option both to diversify against risk and to respond to events; increasing reliance on women's economic activities, and specifically carpet weaving; support from social networks; and aid. However, drought and instability also affected levels of aid as well as the viability of some of household responses, particularly carpet weaving, due to the reasons described above.

## 5. Coping Responses

### 5.1 Responding to rising physical insecurity

While many respondents across the three villages voiced the opinion that it was the responsibility of the police and government to provide security, in the end these institutions did not deliver. The police were perceived as weak and themselves afraid of the Taliban. There was also risk in having a police checkpoint close to a village because it could end up drawing attacks and making the situation worse, as recounted by a female FGD participant from Village A:

*What can villagers do when they are not armed? Can they protect themselves with sticks only? What can people do when the government doesn't assist? I know that the police try to fight with them, but they also can't approach deserts where they [Taliban] are. They are afraid of approaching there too...*

*There is no checkpoint in our part of the village where my house is located, but there is one on the other side. People requested these checkpoints to be removed from around the village when the Taliban attacked one of them and one of my neighbour's sons was killed during that fighting.*

The district government, reportedly with the backing of the Ministry of Interior, turned over the provision of security for the elections in Dawlatabad to a local militia—an *arbaki*—led by Auraz Zabet. Village respondents reported that even though this was approved by government authorities, local communities had to provide Zabet's men with guns. As the leader of Village A recounted, each of the 36 villages in Dawlatabad District bought two guns for the militia, with households from each village contributing to the expense, except for those deemed too poor by the village *shuras*. Many villages expected the guns back after the elections, but according to many respondents, they were never returned. The guns were either left with Zabet's militia or sold off and not accounted for.

*Arbaki is Auraz Zabet's people who the government gave some guns. Because of the Taliban, this arbaki was established. If there is some problem, the arbaki arrives.—Male FGD participant, Village C*

*Some days before the presidential election the woliswal and the chief of police summoned all the qaryadars [traditional community leaders] and heads of shuras to the district office, and the woliswal said to us that we need to keep the security tight for the upcoming election on behalf of Maimana and Kabul's central government. Zabet is the responsible person to keep it secure, so all villages in Dawlatabad have to provide guns for his 70 soldiers and it is up to you how you do this. Then after discussion with each other we from the 36 villages in Dawlatabad accepted to buy two guns per village. Then some days later we bought the guns and submitted them to Auraz Zabet, and now the election is finished, but we do not know where the guns are. I just know two guns are in Auraz Zabet's house with his brother's sons.—Arbab, Village A*

Zabet's role in providing security in the district was contested. Residents from Villages B and C were not happy with the arrangement because his armed group could not maintain their security properly; Village A was more satisfied because there has been less deterioration in its security due to Zabet's closer connections there. However, Zabet's assassination will likely change this.

Some respondents from each village expressed concern about Zabet's violent background during the mujahiddin period and claimed that the government should provide security.

*Although people are not happy from Auraz Zabet's bad background when he used to be a Hezb-i-Islami person during the mujahiddin time, when they were dominated in the villages, people prefer him to be an active person having guns to protect the village from the Taliban and insecurity. During the Hezb-i-Islami time he killed many people in the village and from other villages too, but now he does some good work for people, like paving roads and giving food for people, and protects people from the influence of Taliban in the village.—Arbab, Village A*

*Apart from being a former commander, he [Auraz Zabet] is the leader of one of the [village] shuras. People do not think well of Auraz Zabet. They know what kind of person he is. He also has many gunmen, reported to be as many as 200. They are supported by the GoA [Government of Afghanistan]. It is not clear what they are doing for us. We are not happy with them being there and having gunmen in our village. The police should have guns, not militia such as the arbaki. The police are the people who should provide our security, not the arbaki. We dislike their presence in our village.—Arbab, Village B*

The inability of the government to secure the area has led to declining trust. While the new road and some other development initiatives were welcome, the lack of security trumped these, leading a male FGD participant from Village B to concisely summarise the key question of legitimacy:

*People are trying to maintain good security. But keeping security is related to the government, not to the public. The government should provide security for the people because it is government. Otherwise how we can say it is a government?*

While Zabet was alive, Village A appeared to be the least directly affected by insurgent night incursions or direct threats. Zabet had sufficient power to hold off these aggressions. The other villages did not fare so well. They reported having to buy security by paying *zakat* to the insurgent groups. This is done not individually but within a *qawm* (kinship or tribal group), where typically an elder takes responsibility to collect the money and pay it out. This has livelihood implications, as the taxes generally come to about ten percent of livestock and land proceeds. The problem of night incursions by the Taliban or related groups also put residents in the difficult position of managing these groups at night and facing consequences from the government during the day, as noted in an FGD among wealthier residents of the Pashtun Village C:

*Since Taliban appeared it is clear now that there are two powers. Now it is clear that the Taliban is taking alms and zakat from people. If people give alms and zakat, that would be danger for people from the government side. If people do not give alms and zakat, it is danger during the night.*

The failings of both the *arbaki* and the government to provide security in Village B led residents to act independently, appointing guards to protect its most vulnerable asset—its school. The guards also conduct night patrols of residences:

*...During the nights the people are not sleeping; they keep themselves awake to look after the school in our village. The Taliban now threaten schools, and if they can they would destroy our school, so that we are taking care of our school.*

*...If the government gives us guns we will stand against the Taliban. We bought two guns and gave them to the school's guards. They protect the school during nights.*

*...Since two years we are protecting the school by guns.*—Participants in FGD with wealthier men, Village B

The *arbab* of Village B has also actively sought to limit the presence of the Norwegian PRT in the village because its patrols brought the Taliban at night, accusing villagers of spying for the Americans. The PRT had come once or twice a month, but after the warning it only patrolled once every few months. On top of this, the *arbab* also reported an attempt by the elders to address Taliban presence in the village by seeking the local government's help. This effort at community response and trust in the state backfired terribly, and it can be viewed as one example of why support for the government might wane. As the *arbab* told it, about six people in Village B had direct connections to the Taliban, and were antagonizing the village and bringing in other associates. The elders came together to decide how to address this problem, and they began by speaking with the six residents to explain why support from the international community was needed for the country's development. This did not help, so the elders felt their only remaining choice was to inform the government about what had been happening. The elders went to the district office and met with the chief of police and the district governor, who appreciated their efforts to inform them of the problem. The elders returned to Village B, and some days later the police captured the six Taliban supporters and took the money they had. However, instead of holding the men in custody, the police told them who had informed on them and then released them. The Talibs came back to Village B and killed one of the elders before escaping from the district. The *arbab* reported that this experience taught them it was not in their interest to tell the government about the Taliban, and they questioned how they could expect security and peace from this government.

In the end, the villages had to find their own ways to cope with rising physical insecurity. Responses included paying required informal taxes and appeasing insurgents; maintaining the protection of a local commander; and attempting to obtain state help before finding it dangerously unreliable and turning to self-protection of village assets. None of these can stop the tide of violence and insecurity, however, as was demonstrated in the targeted killing of Village A's protector and leader of the local *arbaki*.

## 5.2 Responding to drought

### *Labour migration*

Labour migration was a widespread phenomenon in the three villages during the data collection period and is a livelihood activity with a long history among Afghans, nationally and in the study district, as a means to diversify against risks.<sup>29</sup> It is also a response strategy employed after downturns. Currently, households in the study villages appear to use labour migration to neighbouring countries as a coping response to both the lack of work due to drought and the risks that young men face due to physical insecurity. Labour migration is also used as an accumulation strategy and an escape from strained family relations. A noticeable number of men of working age in the three villages have migrated recently. A villager from Village C estimated for his village: "Now about 500 people from our village are in Iran. They are going to Iran through *qachaq bars* [human

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<sup>29</sup> Alessandro Monsutti, *Afghan Transnational Networks: Looking Beyond Repatriation* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2006).



smugglers].” From a village of about 900 households, this is a considerable number of young men. Similarly, in Village A one respondent reported: “Nowadays most of the young boys are going to Iran.” For Village B labour migration took place on a large scale, especially during the Taliban years, when it was driven by political harassment combined with drought. With the collapse of the Taliban, some of these migrants returned to the village. However, further drought pushed the men to migrate again. Labour migration as a livelihood activity clearly waxes and wanes according to available work opportunities in the village and district. The migration experiences related by respondents show that international labour migration to Iran and Pakistan is the dominant type of labour movement in the villages. However, some households have undertaken internal labour movements such as to Andkhoy and Mazar-i-Sharif.

Reasons for labour migration vary among households, and differences are particularly noticeable between household wealth groups, but the most common reasons are economic, such as lack of employment and weak village economy. For example, a respondent from a male FGD in Village B related: “The migration is not only caused by poverty but also by insecurity.”

The reliance on labour migration to survive drought and insecurity can have longer-term implications for households that send school-age males to Iran. As the example below from an FGD with men in Village A shows, young men miss out on further education, potentially limiting future income earning opportunities:

*Since the beginning of this new government, people prefer to go to school and families send children to schools. But since one year ago people are losing their interest in education. When boys grow up they try to go to Iran, and most of the families are obliged to send them to Iran for work because of poor economic conditions. When they reach class seven or eight, their parents send them to Iran. Last year we did not have class ninth in our school. We did not have any student in grade nine because they went to Iran.*

A similar story emerged from Village C:

*I am sending my sons to Iran, not to school, because here there is hunger. Now all youth are illiterate. Karzai did not help us. Just last year Red Crescent helped us. Going to Iran and Pakistan is the single option for us to make our life; otherwise we have nothing here.*

For wealthier households, labour migration is increasingly seen as a way to accumulate assets. A poorer villager from Village A complained about it during an FGD, saying, “Although some people have money and they do not have [immediate] need for more money they are going to Iran too. They are going to Iran for *dunya* [the world/worldly wealth], for getting more money and [making a] good life.”

Labour migration is also a means to gain economic status, and to build a reputation for credit worthiness (being able to repay credit from remittances) and for being a source of credit. Different villagers expressed this idea; for example, one participant from a male FGD in Village C said, “Those people who have sons in Iran, their lives are good; and those people who do not have any son in Iran, their lives are not good.” Another participant from the group reported, “Those people who have gone to Iran and came back to the village, their lives are good, and we can take credit from them.”

In order to engage in and potentially benefit from labour migration as an economic strategy, households need to have sufficient males of working age. Therefore the number and ages of male members of the household limits the extent to which a household is able to benefit from this strategy. Those with only one male member or with only young children cannot take advantage of labour migration and are consequently more vulnerable to the impacts of drought and other changes affecting the local economy.

Some young men, particularly from Villages A and B, also viewed labour migration as a way to express their disagreement with or unwillingness to fulfil their parent's desires, especially around marriage, or as a way to express their emotional stress in response to the strains of rural life during and after drought. For example, the male head of Household A19 explained why his son left for Iran, showing the strain drought-related poverty places on household reproduction and relations:

*He got angry and went to Iran. He asked me to marry him with someone, but I said to him we did not have money because I am sick and there is drought in the village. How I should get you married? Then he did not listen to me and got angry and went to Iran during the drought years. I think it was four years ago.*

The male head of wealthy Household B26 explained how his 28-year-old son migrated to Iran as a way to escape the hardship of village life, and how current levels of insecurity, rather than financial factors, have impacted his son's decision not to return home:

*Still one of my sons is in Iran. He went because he could not adjust to the situation [common hunger and poverty] here in the village. When this new government came he told me that he could no longer stay here in the village and he wanted to go to Iran. Then I got it that if he could not adjust himself here it would be better if he went to Iran, so I let him go. Last year he sent about 70,000 Afs home from Iran; however, I did not need this money. I told him that we did not need his money, just come back home [because] we have a good life here. But his brothers called him and said that we have a good life here, but we are again afraid of the Taliban. The security is not good now and we cannot go to deserts [our rain-fed lands] because of the Taliban. It is better that he doesn't come back to Afghanistan right now. I think when the situation gets better he would come back home.*

However, international labour migration is not without considerable risks. The travel itself is risky, and if a migrant successfully reaches Iran there is a threat of deportation. Therefore migration can bring further emotional and financial stress to households, particularly when their migrant members are deported shortly upon arrival, after dangerous and costly travel. For example, the male head of Household C56 expressed his feeling of being under pressure to earn a living when his two sons of working age were deported from Iran and were unable to find employment thereafter in the village. He also shared his willingness to have his sons migrate again, even though they would go into more debt:

*When my sons went to Iran they stayed there three months. They worked there and paid the human smuggler his money. After three months they were deported through the Nimroz Province border with Iran, and now they are in debt of 200,000 toman [10,000 Afs]...Now again I have planned to send them back to Iran. They would do wage labouring and loader work there, and would collect some money to pay back the credit. If I can find some money for them again I would send them back to Iran.*

Use of smugglers to enter Iran is not unusual and comes at a high cost, as the experience of Household C56 makes clear.<sup>30</sup> Others also reported paying significant amounts to get across the border. This fee is paid from earnings upon arrival, meaning sums are left owing if the migrant is deported (as in the case above), and family back in Afghanistan cannot expect remittance income until the debt is paid. Some households reported raising the funds to pay the fee through asset sales, as illustrated by villagers during an FGD in Village B: “One person from each household was in Iran. Whoever had livestock or land, they sold them and went to Iran.” Box 2 relates some of the risks and costs of migration, as told by a range of respondents.

**Box 2: Risks and costs of labour migration to Iran from Dawlatabad**

*First, up to Nimroz Province we spend 5,000 Afs. There are some human smugglers in Nimroz when we arrive there; we discuss with the human smugglers, to decide which one of them will take us at low cost to Iran. Then we choose one of them to take us to Iran. The smuggler is waiting for a group of 20 people to form; when 20 people are complete, then the smuggler seats them in a pick-up truck, and they travel through the desert halfway to Iran. At the halfway point, another pick-up comes. Then they take the people to buses. If on the way the checkpoints stop the buses, the smugglers give them some money and the checkpoints let them go. And in some places where the checkpoints do not take money, the smuggler takes the people through the desert.—Participant in male FGD, Village C*

*Qachaq bar [human smuggler] is taking them to Iran. Those are people who have been to Iran a lot and know the way and are familiar with how to go to Iran. They are taking from one person 25,000 Afs. The smuggler tells to those who want to go to Iran, if I take you to Iran you will pay me 25,000 Afs. If I fail, you do not need to pay me.—Participant in male FGD, Village A*

*If they are deported they come back to the village, and they have no way to pay except they have to sell their lands to pay the smuggler’s money. One of my neighbours went to Iran. He took about 20,000 Afs with himself from his mother. When, after six months, he came back from Iran, he took 10,000 Afs more from his mother. He took about 30,000 Afs from his home and did not bring anything from Iran.—Participant in male FGD, Village A*

*I sent my son to Iran with a qachaq bar. The qachaq bar takes about 400,000-500,000 tomans [one Afs is equal to 20 tomans]. From the border between Iran and Afghanistan, the qachaq bars take the boys to Iran. On the way they sell them to Baluch qachaq bars, and then these men take the boys to Iran, to those cities to which they have agreement with qachaq bars.—Male respondent, Household B21*

Labour migration, even with all its risks, makes an important contribution to the village economy in all three villages, to varying degrees. It seems that Village C relies on labour migration more, due to the harder impact of drought there compared with the other two villages. As a key informant from this village reported, “Nowadays people [of the village]

<sup>30</sup> The same was found in the Sar-i-Pul case study, where labour migration was similarly a common livelihood strategy in the face of recurring and severe drought. See Tom Shaw, “Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories: Evidence from Sar-i-Pul” (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2010).

have three kinds of income sources: one is rain-fed land, the second is irrigated land and the third income source is labour migration to Iran.”

### ***Women’s economic contributions***

Women have had a visible role in the economy of the three villages through weaving various types of carpets, livestock rearing and processing livestock products, and engaging in agriculture activities and gleaning. The latter activity is more marginal and was a way in which some widows in Villages A and B survived with their children during the years of drought. These contributions are in addition to women’s domestic responsibilities. This section focuses on women’s carpet weaving to illustrate women’s important role in household livelihoods, particularly during the drought.

The three villages have a tradition of making carpets, or *gelims*, in which most women have been involved. Carpet weaving was not reported to be a primary income source for the villages, except in very poor households that did not have any other means of income generation; this group included female-headed households. For most, carpet weaving contributed to household welfare through providing money for items like cooking oil or sugar; providing in-kind dowry for a new bride, and therefore helping to manage marriage arrangements; or simply providing a cushion of savings for unexpected events such as ill health. However, the role of carpet weaving in village livelihoods changed when drought and political instability reduced other livelihood options in the villages. These changes placed a greater burden on women to weave more carpets in order to cover household essentials such as wheat flour. Therefore, the importance of income from women’s carpet weaving work increased during the periods of drought in all three study villages. It was an important coping response, even though survival through this work became much more difficult with the changes to the carpet market and production relations.

During the first period of drought, which coincided with the Taliban’s control of the district, female carpet weaving was a significant part of the labour profiles in the villages. This was particularly the case in Villages A and B, due to considerable diminution of male labour opportunities. As drought and rising insecurity impeded agriculture production, carpet making replaced it as an important source of livelihood. As one male respondent in Village B explained, “...we passed our life through carpet weaving.” Likewise, a woman from Village B stated: “...women were very busy with carpet weaving to survive.”

During both periods of drought females provided almost all of the labour in producing carpets, with work-days extended to long hours, lasting from early morning until late evening. One key informant working with an NGO labelled it as a “slavery scheme.” This work left little time for other labour such as household maintenance and child-care. The long hours also brought health problems for women, as a woman from Village B shared: “...Many carpet weavers suffer from physical problems like eyesight problems...and [with sad look] look at my fingers, how deformed they became!” She went on to describe the difference in work conditions when weaving independently and on commission, illustrating how overwhelming working on commission was for women:

*We are happier if we weave our own material. We can weave, not in rush, weave whenever we want. I mean we can do our house chores tranquilly and then weave the carpet. We have to weave from early morning to late evening when we weave on commission. We have not much time to do house chores or take care of children because we have a limited time frame to finish the carpet in this case. We would be fined if we do not finish it on time.*

Women in Villages A and B were more successful in supporting their households through carpet weaving because they produced woven carpets (*qalin*) that could be sold at higher prices, though weaving that type of carpet required more labour time. Women in Village C were not familiar with producing *qalin*; therefore they wove lower-value *gelim* and *palas*. However, demand also must be considered in assessing which carpet type might provide more security. The high costs of *qalins* means their sales have been more affected by the global financial crisis. More recently, the value of *gelim* and *palas* woven in Village C has increased from between 20-30 Afs per square metre to 50 Afs. The apparent reason is the greater affordability of this type of carpet for local residents because the material is less fine and not dyed, and the pattern is simple; as a result, local demand is higher. Respondents reported that the price of a 12 square metre carpet is closer to US\$140, compared to US\$600 for a *qalin*.

Since women play central roles in producing carpets, the age and number of women within a household affects its ability to initiate or expand its involvement in carpet weaving in response to drought or other needs. Women respondents describe carpet making as an “excruciating job” which whittles down the health of weavers. This is partly because of its nature and the properties of the looms on which women weave carpets, as well as because of the dust from fibres. These factors, plus women’s involvement in the activity from a young age, may explain why middle-aged women seem no longer able to weave carpets. Having fresh and young female labour<sup>31</sup> within a household makes possible more security of livelihood through weaving carpets, while losing this labour because of age and the negative health effects of weaving, or because of marriage, limit it. The situation of the participant in the FGD below provides an illustration of these dynamics:

*Now the representatives of bais are providing the fabrics from Andkhoy. I did have four sisters in that time, so I did have good carpet weaving; since they got married there is no one to weave the carpet. Now I have an old mother who is sick and cannot work; sometimes her blood pressure gets high...In the past we had many bais in Dawlatabad, and they used to buy and sell our carpets.—Participant in male FGD, Village A*

Social development in the villages since 2001 has also had implications for the ability of households to weave carpets productively. Since schools have been constructed inside Villages A and B, enrolment of girls in school has increased. Consequently, these girls have less time to spend in carpet weaving compared with before—a positive development, but one that may become difficult to sustain in economic crises, when income from carpets is more necessary.

The data show that the respondent households use carpet weaving as an “activity of crisis”—to fill shortfalls in household income and support survival. It tends not to be an activity households wish to engage in continuously, reflecting the difficulty of the work and its low returns. Evidence that carpet weaving plays a “gap filler” role includes the fact that carpet production levels were higher during the period of drought coinciding with the Taliban’s rule than they were during the more recent drought. The difference in production levels can be attributed to there being fewer options for male labour in the former period. In contrast, carpet-weaving activity declined in good agriculture years during which surplus was produced. Therefore, a reduction in carpet weaving has been reported over the last year, when the households could produce and stock food essentials from their own agricultural production, particularly in Village B. The

<sup>31</sup> While some men gained carpet-weaving skills as refugees and continue this work after return, weaving remains primarily a female occupation.

statements below highlight the struggle to earn enough to support basic consumption through carpet weaving, demonstrating the desire to abandon the activity if conditions allow.

*My four sisters were weaving the carpets, and they used to weave one carpet in two months. Then my brothers joined them, and they used to weave a carpet in one month. Now we are weaving a carpet in two months...Maybe a carpet's money was lasting one month for our household consumption. Sometimes it was enough and sometimes it was not enough for us.—Male respondent, Household B34*

*People no longer weave carpets; only very poor people who have no other income source still weave carpets. They prefer not to weave carpets, particularly when they get a good crop from the land like this year. You know carpet weaving is a difficult job. Many carpet weavers suffer from physical problems like eyesight problems. That is why people would rather not weave carpets if they do not have much economic problems.—Participant in female FGD, Village B*

### **Social links**

All of the respondents viewed social links within their village and with power holders outside of it as a way of achieving a degree of livelihood security. Few formal institutional mechanisms exist to assist them. The extent to which the households succeed in achieving security is dependent on the range of social resources available to them, individually and at village level, and on factors associated with the village context, such as its proximity to the market. For example, Village A is closer to the district market, and until recently had a strong leader in Zabet, making its social supports stronger. This section looks at some of the ways social linkages function, particularly through informal credit and help networks, marriage relations and aid delivery.

#### **Credit and informal safety nets**

AREU research has noted the important role of informal credit networks in providing a social safety net.<sup>32</sup> The Faryab study villages were no different in this, with the majority of study households across wealth groups reporting having to take credit through their informal networks during the drought to meet basic household needs, including food, inputs for farming and medical treatment. While the need to take credit to buy food and agriculture inputs was a direct result of drought, the need for credit to pay for health shocks was an indirect result. The effects of drought on ground water sources, which typically supplied potable water, increased the burden of ill-health costs on livelihoods, particularly in Village C. The effect of drought combined with other economic dynamics led to rising prices of goods, including food. This affected household food intake quality, with related long-term health effects.

Respondents reported credit being offered in different forms—in-kind, in-cash and through provision of agriculture labour, such as ploughing, with delayed payment. During drought most of the study households, but especially those without irrigated lands, had little choice but to buy food on credit from shopkeepers. While drought led households to rely on credit for daily needs—some for the first time and others more intensively than previously—it also limited the availability of some credit forms. For

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32 Klijn and Pain, *Finding the Money*.

example, *taqawi*,<sup>33</sup> which often provided a way to meet food needs in the villages, could no longer be practised during drought due to low farm production. Acquaintanceship with a shopkeeper in the market or having enough labour sources within the household, such as male members able to go to Iran or female members weaving carpets, usually enabled households to access in-kind credit from shops. These characteristics showed repayment potential.

Cash credit usually was given in small amounts. A shopkeeper in Dawlatabad market<sup>34</sup> reported that credit was given in amounts in the range of 1,000-1,300 Afs, while a poor household from Village A reported receiving at most 500-600 Afs. One FGD participant in Village C reported that loans of up to 4,000 Afs in cash could be taken, though only from credit sources inside the village. However, having a son working in Iran allowed some households to obtain larger amounts of cash credit. In one such example, a household from Village B reported obtaining 10,000 Afs.

Links with the market expand the available sources of credit for some, providing more choice of lenders, including shopkeepers and input suppliers. Some respondents reported accessing credit from these sources with interest. This was most common among respondents from Village C, who reported paying interest of 25 percent. Therefore, while credit is necessary to survival, credit with interest can put significant strain on livelihoods in the long term. Repaying the principal alone is often a challenge, particularly when the credit is used for consumption.

Households weaving carpets in dependent relationships with traders obtain credit through these relationships by taking cash in advance of carpet production and repaying when the carpet is complete. The credit received tends to heighten the weavers' dependence on the traders, making them less able to seek out new sources of work, or move toward more independent means of production. This kind of cash credit also never exceeds the estimated price of the carpet being woven. In some cases the carpet money is already spent by the time the carpet is finished, as the head of Household A19 illustrated:

*The representative [of the carpet trader] gives them [the weavers] the raw material, like yarns and other things for the carpet, and some money in advance—like 40-50 dollars. In the end, when my daughters finish the carpet the representative accounts how much money we got from him as advance and how much he should pay us. Most of the time, we already spend the money [from the carpet] in advance. Some days before I got 140 dollars in advance from the representative; I spent this money already. [If we do not get more in advance until] we complete this carpet we will be paid 300 dollars, including the 140 dollars that we got in advance. We survive our life though carpet weaving.*

For many poor households—usually female-headed households or households with a disabled male head—religious obligations and cultural norms of the community are the most important factors offering them a dependent form of livelihood security. *Ushr*, charity and the exchange of gifts when a child is born, which sometimes come in the form of livestock, are the mechanisms through which such poor households survive.

Evidence suggests, however, that long-lasting drought has exhausted many of these informal and community-based livelihood support mechanisms. Cash credit is reported

33 A small amount of informal in-kind credit, often foodstuff and primarily wheat, typically repaid at the next harvest time.

34 This shopkeeper is originally from Village A.

to be less available compared with before, especially for poorer households. As one respondent during an FGD among wealthier men in Village A said, “People do not have cash [now]. If they had cash they gave credit together.” Another respondent said, “No one in the village is able to give cash credit to the poor. Only shopkeepers are giving credit to poor people. If any of their relatives are in Iran and send them money, then they repay the credit.” A poor household from Village C that was 20,000 Afs in debt also reported the lack of availability of credit for poor people. These statements demonstrate that lenders are paying more attention to borrowers’ ability to repay a loan, reflecting their declining ability to give credit and, as a result, greater concern about the risk associated with slow repayment. This reality is illustrated in the struggle of Household C56 to identify a new source of credit, resulting from an inability to repay old debt: “Now I am thinking from whom I should take some credit for my sons. I am already in debt to those people from whom I want to take credit, so I do not have courage to ask them again for credit, because so far I could not return their money.”

The giving of *zakat*, *taqawi* and charity also declined due to poor agriculture outcomes during drought. However, as a result of good production over the last harvesting season, respondents reported an increase in the giving of *zakat* during the data collection period. These variations illustrate both the embedded nature of these forms of support in social life—they may decline in difficult times, but they rebound—as well as the extreme precariousness of a life dependent upon them.

The constraints on lending within local networks affected wealthier respondent households too. The prolonged drought depleted income-generating resources for all, meaning the larger loan amounts required by wealthier households to supplement their income and meet daily needs were unavailable. A respondent from a wealthier household in Village A, who sold eight *jeribs* (one *jerib* equals approximately one-fifth of a hectare) of his rain-fed land to meet household expenditures, said, “There is no one in the village that can give as much credit as I needed and which I was able to get through selling my land. For the last two years I have been spending that money. Two years ago, I sold my land because I did not have any other income.”

### **Marriage**

Marriage is a means to expand or strengthen social connections that can then be useful in times of difficulty, though the evidence above illustrates how there can be limits to these social relationships when times are bad. The study villages differed in their customs of marriage across ethnicity and, therefore, the extent to which family connections expanded across these lines. For the Pashtuns in Village C, marrying within one’s ethnic group is the norm, as was mentioned by respondent C43:

*I did get my daughter married in my own tribe. We did not marry our daughters to another tribe yet, and we do not marry our daughters to other tribes such as Uzbek and Turkmen people. Our relationship with Uzbek and Turkmen people is very good, but neither we marry their daughters nor they marry our daughters.*

For Villages A and B, there was evidence that it is more common to intermarry across ethnicities, providing the potential for greater diversity among social networks. The field team observed several cases of marriage between individuals from Turkmen and Uzbek ethnic groups.

Marriage can contribute to the financial resilience of household livelihoods or cause considerable strain. Some households see daughters’ marriages as a way to repay loans



through the bride price received, while boys' marriages often require borrowing to meet the related costs. For some poor households with no or few male labour resources, marrying a daughter is an option of last resort to repay large debts. The story in Box 3 illustrates such a case.

**Box 3: Option of last resort: Marrying a daughter to repay loans**

Ghulum (Gul) Mohammad from Village A is in his fifth decade of life. He injured his hand in fighting during the mujahiddin period, and as a result is unable to carry materials with his hand. He is the only earner in a household of six members: his three daughters, his wife and his mother, besides himself. He married his wife with money from his brother, who was an army officer with the government. In exchange for this help, Gul Mohammad served his brother as a khana saman (house servant) for ten years. Because he was not able to physically work and does not have another household member to rely on, he was forced to sell his two jeribs of land and become dependant on his brother and the community, who supplied him with food staples to survive during the drought. Support from the community also helped him to avoid losing his house last year, the only physical asset he has remaining. Recently, all of the financial support he received from his brother was calculated to be 100,000 Afs, which he is responsible for repaying. Because he has no other way to meet this obligation, he offered his 12-year-old daughter in marriage to his nephew. He stated, "Now there is a list of money showing how much I am in debt to my brother. Some days before, my brother's son showed me the list. I said to him that I will give you my daughter instead of your father's money. I will give my daughter and I will not get any bride price from you."

The practice of marrying off a daughter to repay a loan is not limited to poor households. Household C43—with diverse means of livelihood including irrigated land, 200 *jeribs* of rain-fed land, ten *jeribs* of vineyard and livestock—reported relying on bride price for daughters' marriages to repay a debt of 200,000 Afs, incurred for agriculture inputs. Interestingly, because the household had considerable social reputation in the village, due to its wealth and the head of household's role as *qaryadar* in the past, it asked for a higher bride price for the daughters. As the head of the household said,

*I did take bride price, but more than the common bride price. If the common bride price is 400,000 Afs, I took 800,000 Afs. I told them—the groom's family—that we are high-profile people in the village and we have to act as high-profile people. Our bride price should be more than other people in the village.*

Based on this, the household received 1,400,000 Afs (approximately US\$28,000) as bride price. The head claimed that he would do the same if the household again faced difficulty in meeting its needs:

*Even if I get a good harvest, there would not be any surplus from our harvest for me. If again I become in debt, I will marry another daughter to get the bride price and will repay my debt, because I have many daughters to marry them off.*

Marriage is not only a pre-crisis strategy to develop social connections, or a debt-related response strategy based on the receipt of bride price. Marriage can also be a burden due to the high cost of bride price and other related marriage expenses. The highest

amount of bride price reported in Village A was US\$12,000-15,000, with average being US\$7,000-8,000. In Village C, 600,000-800,000 Afs (equal to US\$12,000-16,000) is the average, while in Village B Household B34 report going 50,000 Afs into debt due to the engagement of a son. An FGD with wealthy male residents from Village A provided evidence of rising bride prices in that village, with payments being made in dollars now, instead of Afghani.

*Before, people were taking bride price in Afghani, but now they are taking it in dollars...Before, the bride price was 4,000 dollars, but now it is 12,000 dollars, so that poor people are not able to pay it...*

*In the past, most of the people used to get 50 goats and sheep and some camels, but now it changed to dollars since this government came. Now the bride price is 12,000 dollars.*

Two reasons given for the increase in bride price are the length of time it takes grooms' families to pay (made longer as the cost increases) and inflation. It seems, at least in Village A, that bride prices are rising in part to account for the future cost of the dowry goods, which are paid for out of bride price funds. This is because most households are unable to pay the high bride prices at one time, or even over a short payment period—this is the case across the villages, not only in Village A. Therefore, respondents reported that the time required to raise bride price funds became far longer for households across all wealth groups in the study villages, with an average of two to three years for wealthier households and six years or more for other households. This has led to delayed marriage for boys and, consequently, for girls.

Selling assets and labour migration to Iran are ways in which some households raise marriage costs, but they are not possible for all. Communities also show their cohesion and the strength of the moral economy through providing help to meet the costs of marriage ceremonies and related celebrations. A participant in the FGD with wealthier households from Village B reported that there are more families needing such help with wedding costs, due to the drought and the effects of rising insecurity:

*The people who need to be helped for their weddings have increased since the economic situations of people got worse over the last few years, and they did not have anything because of drought and the Taliban. If the life of people is good, one poor person or two poor people get married easily without any exchange of help...And this year also, more people helped poor people because the wealthy people got enough harvest from their lands.*

### **Aid delivery**

The Faryab interviews provide evidence of the importance of aid to short-term crisis responses, as well as to longer-term development. On the subject of short-term coping, respondent households in the three study villages reported that food assistance distributed by NGOs over the years of drought and during the recent global rise in food prices was vital to survival, though not sufficient. In 2008, the Afghan Red Crescent Society twice distributed food supplies to vulnerable households in the three villages. It should be noted that some in Village B commented that the food aid provided was insufficient to meet the need.

Aid delivered during this period was not limited to food. Farming inputs, especially seeds and livestock fodder, were also distributed by aid agencies and the government. A CHA [Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance] employee recalls those hard days:

*During drought people would have died of hunger if there had not been food distributions that allowed them to survive one or two months. In addition to food assistance, FAO [the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations] has helped villagers by providing animal fodder and certified wheat seed. Action Aid has also distributed seeds.*

However, as previously noted, some of the seeds may not have been appropriate to the climate. Respondents reported that the seeds required more water than was available locally, and wheat rust affected the crop in 2009, the first good year of rains for some time.

Support received in the form of temporary employment in the villages provided households with some cash income or food. For example, in 2008 carpet weaving opportunities were provided to vulnerable households, such as those headed by widows or old men; construction of a school in Village B provided opportunities for 90 days of work for some residents. WFP, under its Food for Work (FFW) programme, also provided the villages with some seasonal employment fixing the road to the villages and cleaning up irrigation canals. Villagers earning cash for such work were paid between 130-200 Afs per day. This helped some households to mitigate drought impacts, with respondents from Village A noting that the FFW programme was well-organized and the benefits distributed equally. However, the WFP agent was the commander associated with this village, perhaps influencing perceptions there.

The study villages also benefited from wider development in the district and province since 2002. The paving of the ring road between the district centre and major cities in the north led to livelihood and welfare improvements. A reduction in food prices was reported, in comparison to the past when the road was not paved. The paved road resulted in easier access to major markets in Maimana and Mazar-e-Sharif and allowed those villagers with agriculture surpluses during good agriculture years to more efficiently export their goods to international markets. For example, a participant in the FGD with wealthy villagers from Village B reported: “We are exporting our grapes to Pakistan [now]. Before, when we were exporting our grapes to Andkhoy, half of them were damaged on the way because of the unpaved road. But now we can send our grapes within two days to Pakistan.”

The recent supplying of electricity to the study villages, funded in part through the NSP CDCs in two of the villages, reduced household expenditures on fuel for lighting purposes. Household B31 reported reducing fuel expenses from 1,000 to 200 Afs per month. In addition, electricity gave some women the opportunity to earn small amounts money sewing clothing. However, access to electricity resulted in an additional burden on the livelihoods of poorer households, since collective funds were only used to bring electric lines into the village; individual households had to pay for the materials to connect to the grid. This often resulted in poorer households selling some of their small remaining herds of livestock or borrowing money to meet the programme obligations, including electricity bills. As a poor respondent from Village A said,

*Most of the time I am in the desert to collect bushes or doing farming on others' rain-fed lands. Once I was in the desert, and when I came back I saw our villagers had started to build a school. I became very happy. I saw the others had electricity and I did not. My brothers told me that we had electricity in the village, and we had to bring the electricity to our home. I told my brothers that we are poor people and cannot afford the expenses for electricity. Later we supplied the electricity to our home, but now I am in debt of 3,000 Afs for electricity bills that I cannot pay.*

This section reviewed the responses of residents of the study villages in the face of rising insecurity and prolonged and repeated drought. It highlighted the weak or absent formal institutional support in both cases, which left the villages to rely on a range of informal means of survival and protection. Village residents expected the state to play a role in providing physical security, in particular, and resorted to their own means when this did not materialise in reliable ways, if at all. The case evidence of responses to drought supports the existence of a moral economy of help in the study villages; however, this moral economy provides variable support during periods of crisis, making life precarious at best for those most dependent on it.

## 6. Conclusion

This case study tells the story of three villages in Faryab's Dawlatabad District, where different forms of insecurity have led to downward livelihood trajectories for residents, even those who were relatively wealthy. It is a story characterised by social fragmentation and ethnic diversity, in which the political and economic fortunes of the three study villages rose and fell due in part to the positioning of their leaders across different phases of conflict. Therefore, it is a story of allegiances—to patrons like Rasul Pahlawan or Auraz Zabet, or to movements like the Taliban—as well as of social prejudices and mistrust, most recently manifested in the current environment of rising incursion by insurgents. The need for ties to informal power-holders has remained constant even today. These associations with local power-holders, though precarious, remain the primary means to achieve a measure of security, particularly physical security, given the weakness of state institutions. Their precariousness has been illustrated across the political history of the district, with leaders assassinated or forced to flee, leaving their dependents behind to cope as best they can.

The story of the three study villages is also one of economic insecurity, linked to long-term conflict and related asset loss, compounded by periods of severe drought leading to the decline of agriculture and livestock livelihood potential, and concomitantly linked to declines in wage labour availability and the viability of the carpet sector. The study villages all experienced these effects to varying extents, depending on access to irrigation water, the relative importance of livestock in livelihoods and that of carpet weaving. The drivers of economic insecurity were not only local; crises in the global economy also buffeted these villages, increasing the effects of drought and illustrating the extent of global connectedness. The global rise in prices of basic foodstuff in 2008 deeply affected Afghanistan and these villages, driving up wheat prices, among others, at a time when crop output and subsistence production was meagre in the study area. In addition, the global financial crisis reportedly reduced demand for high quality *qalins*, particularly impacting Village A, and reducing the returns and reliability of an activity families turn to in periods of crisis.

What does this case study tell us in relation to the ALT study's major research questions? First, livelihood security in the villages has declined since 2002, due to drought and its economic effects and compounded by the recent deterioration in physical security. The effects of drought were most severe in Village C, due to its heavier reliance on rain-fed agriculture, but all of the villages experienced decline. Deteriorating security also had negative livelihood effects across the villages, but to differing extents based on ethnic majority and the presence of a strong leader. All three villages have been severely affected by movement restrictions necessitated by the presence of Taliban in the desert areas where livestock are grazed and where rain-fed land is located. However, the presence of Auraz Zabet as protector of Village A, as well as head of the local *arbaki*, meant Village A was less directly affected by the growing insecurity and night raids by insurgents. The recent killing of Zabet will likely change this. Village C experienced further movement restrictions because of the fear of being associated with the insurgents, due to assumed ties based on ethnic background.

The case study also shows that the villages have had to continue relying on their own resources and resourcefulness in the face of economic and physical insecurity. Their responses to economic decline have included continuing the region's historic pattern of economic migration to reduce risks and respond to the effects of drought and rising insecurity; increasing reliance on carpet weaving in times of drought, even with the changes in the sector's relations of production, which make it less profitable; relying on

support from social connections for informal credit or other help; and, in the last year of the most recent drought, relying on small but reportedly vital inflows of food aid.

Villagers have also been forced to rely on local mechanisms to cope with rising physical insecurity, even though respondents viewed the provision of physical security as the government's responsibility and as being important to state legitimacy. The state's inability to provide security led to official state sanction of the creation of a local militia, formed to protect the 2009 elections with arms paid for by the district's communities. Also as a result, Village A became dependent on the *arbaki* leader for security, and Village B bought arms for guards to protect its school. One can conclude that in the face of a weak state, often seemingly driven more by self-interest than the public good, the villages have further developed or maintained past strategies of resilience based on self-reliance and social connections. However, these connections infrequently cross social divisions and may be weakened, though not broken, by long-term stresses like drought.

The study findings point to a need for interventions to improve physical security in the area in ways that are sensitive to the social and political complexities of the district. For example, efforts by the provincial governor at the time of the study to create a Pashtun *shura* to address the growing insecurity risked backfiring; this was because Pashtuns felt stigmatised and felt that the role played by other social groups in the rising insecurity was not acknowledged. Development interventions to improve both agriculture-based livelihood activities and non-farm activities also need to be based on an understanding of the context and existing mechanisms supporting resilience. Key areas for support include analysis of the carpet sector to develop realistic strategies for improving market access and the positioning of weaving households; development of insurance products aimed at reducing the effects of agricultural risks such as drought, disease or pests; and strengthening political will to support agreements formalising labour migration between Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries.

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