

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

TO : Mr. Charles W. Johnson, D-AD/DP

FROM : Richard B. Scott, DP

SUBJECT: Elements in Organizing Farmer Work-Gangs for the
Helmand Drainage Project.

DATE: November 9, 1973

This memo outlines some elements to be considered in organizing the farmer work-gangs necessary to dig the on-farm drains in the Helmand Drainage Project. The ideas come from a discussion with Mr. Asef of HAVA. He is a trained engineer who has been a participant to the U.S. He is presently head of the soils lab, and in his middle years, an experienced man. In 1972 he was saddled with the job of organizing the field activities of the Food-for-Work program in the Helmand. The program involved projects in five areas of the Helmand from Nawzad in the north to the project areas of Nad-i-Ali and Marja. The hand-dug on-farm drains usually shown to visitors in Marja are products of this activity. The total program involved a labor force of 3-5000 men. The labor force was organized through a series of labor supervisors or contractors.

Mr. Asef stated that he did not see any great barrier to mobilizing perhaps 3000 men from the immediate areas of the project. For example, the men to work in Nad-i-Ali would be drawn from Nad-i-Ali itself (perhaps as high as 50%), Marja and Shamalan. He said with a rotating work schedule, the work force from the Nad-i-Ali project could be expected to move as far as Darwishan for work. He noted that as work progressed it could be expected that laborers would be recruited from as far as Kandahar, Nawzad and Musa Kala.

Although Mr. Asef was aware of some out-migration of labor to Iran where they were thought to receive 200-300 afs. per day for common labor, he saw no great difficulty in recruiting the labor force necessary for the project during about 7-8 months outside the harvest-replanting-cotton picking seasons. He indicated that a series of labor organizers would be required to recruit and supervise the labor force. He advised against a simple contract arrangement where a contractor would be responsible for receiving and distributing the funds. First, the income taxes for such an arrangement are so high that interest in being a contractor would be minimal. But an arrangement where the man recruiting would receive a part of the laborers pay could be worked out. For example, if a man



were to receive 25 Afs. per M^3 of earth moved, then perhaps 1 Af. of this would go to the organizer. Mr. Asef argued against using the farmer on whose land the drain is to be dug as the organizer, saying that if the project starts we want a continuous and sustained effort. He suggested that the farmers, while perhaps initially interested in the idea of drains, some would lose or not have the interest to get the work completed, and, as farmers, they would have other demands on their time. A locally recruited (like a Nad-i-Ali resident) labor organizer for each project area was suggested as being the most reliable for the project purposes. This would be a man with local ties and connections who has a long term involvement, i. e. , he could not easily escape with funds.

Mr. Asef stated that in the Nad-i-Ali and Marja areas workers could be expected to move 2-3 M^3 of earth per day. There were wider variations in the Nad-i-Ali soils than in Marja, and in some cases it may be necessary to use machines in Nad-i-Ali where there are hard packed or types of soils (I did not understand his technical explanation in detail) and conglomerate. In Marja there could be as high as 5 M^3 of earth moved per day by some workers given the incentive. Given his experience with the soils in these two areas he doubted the trench-like side slopes being suggested for some drain work, saying it is like putting a clod of earth as a permanent stepping stone across a stream (related to a proverb). He noted that the narrow verticle cuts seen in Marja for on-farm-drains were only used to cut through the major drain banks which are compacted and also do not have the hydraulic pressures present in the fields themselves. But this is a technical and cost detail.

Relative to organizing the labor force, it was suggested that arrangements be made where each worker would be given responsibility for digging a section of drain thus getting paid actually by the amount of earth moved. Under such an arrangement it was noted that some stronger workers would perhaps move 5 M^3 per day. Since close relatives and friends will be recruited together such small groups may be willing to work as an earth moving unit. The incentive would be to move more earth which would not be present if a large labor force were working with a daily wage estimating that each man could move 1 M^3 of earth per day. Under such circumstances some laborers would work and some would simply pass the day and all would receive the same pay. When discussing a daily wage in a different context, 50 Afs per day was viewed as maximum.

Workers will not likely understand the concept of M^3 of earth moved as a unit of work. It was noted that the careful explanation on pay to the worker would be in terms of running meters of ditch of specified dimensions. Then the work would need supervision for side slopes and other technical details. In total, it was noted, a complicated business. He estimated that a work crew of 50 men could dig about a kilometer a month of drain similar to those done for Food-for-Work in the Nad-i-Ali - - Marja areas and run around $3 M^3$ per running meter.

While Mr. Asef was open and cooperative in discussing his views and experiences in food-for-work, he did not have great interest in becoming involved in the details of the implementation of this part of the present project. Certainly, when the arrangements for the operational details of the hand-dug drains are being discussed, his experience should be used. It is not clear how involved other personnel of the HAVA Planning Division were in the food-for-work experience, one of the few such experiences the present project can profit from.

The plan for organizing labor to do the on-farm drain construction is one of the areas in which the project is lagging. One of several possible reasons for this lag could be the lack of experience in making such arrangements. Whatever the plan, the operational details must be considered as flexible, and monitored carefully in the field if an efficient system is to be developed over time. Bureaucracies, generally have difficulty developing the concept of flexibility into a system of operation. HAVA is no exception. While USAID has more or less limited its participation to reimbursing for construction completed, an advisory input might be useful at this time as a kind of catalyst for the variety of ideas apparently being considered for organizing the labor force to be used in the on-farm drains.

cc: Mr. Standish, CDE
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