

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

# Memorandum

TO : Mr. John Standish, CDE

DATE: August 9, 1976

FROM : Richard B. Scott, DP

SUBJECT: Recruitment of a Hand-Labor Force for On-Farm Drain Construction:  
Helmand Drainage Project

There are a number of elements to consider, and a number of management actions to be taken by HAVA for the recruitment of any sizable labor force in the Helmand to meet immediate project needs:

1. Who: The beginning is the assignment of a capable, willing, experienced HAVA senior staff member to the task of organizing and managing the labor force on a full time basis. To date, the only individual I have discussed the issue with that has an understanding of what is required and the experience in organizing laborers is Mr. Asef, present head of the Soils Lab. I would recommend that USAID ask for his assignment to this task immediately.

At first glance this seems a strong position to take. The question to ask, however, is: How important is the organization of hand labor? It would appear to take some priority over soil lab action although lab operation is a potential project constraint. But Mr. Asef is not a soils scientist and requests have been made to have such a technician assigned to the lab. A forceful suggestion for both could logically be made.

2. Where: HAVA needs to establish a full time office to carry out the recruitment activity. The same office should also be responsible for the organization and supervision of the work in the field. The number of persons on the HAVA staff necessary to carry out this complex of work will be many but this will be dependent upon how the work is organized, discussed below. To start, the office staff should be about 5 men and the office chief. They will require transportation since direct contact with areas of potential laborers is the starting point.



Information, communication and recruitment in the Valley will best be accomplished through face-to-face contact by individuals who can speak the local dialect. Basically, they must have the qualities of a good interviewer; be able to build rapport with the local folk and escape from the role-play of a government civil servant. Not everyone has these qualities. For the best results, the staff of the laborer recruitment office should be selected by the office chief for these qualities rather than simply be appointed from available personnel. All communities in an area where hand-labor is to be accomplished should be canvassed for laborers at the time the labor is needed. And care should be taken that on days when laborers appear for work that recruitment also occurs. The point is that great care must be taken not to build false hopes, and that laborer expectations based on the face-to-face recruitment process are met.

The bureaucratic location of the office should probably be within the Technical Department and a branch of the Construction Section or it should be a separate section of equal rank. A new section equal to Construction, Planning and Engineering would probably be best but there would probably be bureaucratic problems and long delays in establishing such a section. This would ensure, hopefully, cooperation with these other Sections within this Department involved in the Drainage Project. The Administration Department within HAVA will be directly involved in contracting and payroll, but I do not see them having the sorts of skills necessary to work directly with the laborers.

3. How: The decision will have to be made soon on how the work will be organized and paid for; daily wage, piece work contract or large-scale contract.

Suggestions have been made by HAVA to turn the entire hand-labor arrangements over to HCC since they would have more bureaucratic flexibility than HAVA. In a general meeting where the subject was discussed, the HCC representative stated that on these matters he was governed by the same regulations as HAVA. The original suggestion may have been an attempt to pass the buck on an unpopular issue, but it was not accepted by HCC.

Based on past experience in the Valley, large contractors are likely to be the most unsatisfactory. To turn the work of a square kilometer block with 20 kms. of on-farm drain over to one large contractor, for example, would be asking for contracting problems. Large-scale contractors, at least in this region, have consistently proved to be unreliable. There were major problems in the 60's with contractor defaults with drain construction in Marja. In the 70's, under the Food-for-Work program, contractor unreliability was one of the causes for the national program to be abandoned.

Small unit contracts (piece work) with small laborer groups, no middleman, would require supervision but would probably have the best end results. There would be a higher laborer motivation to produce under the piece work system than under the other two methods. As noted in previous memos, however, there appears to be some bureaucratic block to the piece work system. From what I can learn, the special ruling on contracting from the Central Government is not likely to solve the problem.

Daily wage works but would require a larger number of effective HAVA employees than have been made available to date. The short working hours (by the laborers standards), regular pay, and limited pressure to produce makes this a most acceptable arrangement from the standpoint of these rural laborers. With proper supervision, this daily wage system has proved to be productive also but potentially not as productive as the piece work system. In the recent past, productivity apparently began to falter at the time Mr. Asef, the top layer of supervision, was directed into other activities (reflecting HAVA loss of interest?). The pay daily level could be re-examined but 40 afs per day outside harvest season is likely to prove sufficient.

Without attempting to beat a dead horse, USAID must consider the possibility that the delays in arrangement for larger hand-labor forces, even under the daily wage method, along with marginally adequate (at best) field supervision of the small labor force in Nad-i-Ali over the past 6 months, are a reflection of the lack of HAVA interest in this aspect of the project rather than accept at face value the variously stated line of excuses. And this ignores the fact that the other three project areas have yet to see even token hand-labor forces.

4. Conclusion: I have indicated some of the already frequently discussed points that relate to the recruitment of large numbers of hand-laborers. Certainly the issue is more complex than noted here. But the starting point rests with HAVA in the establishment of an office, staff and the assignment of a full time, experienced person to run the operation. The priority USAID places on the activity suggests some kind of key action, like the assignment of Mr. Asef to the work. The actions taken to date by HAVA on the issue does not suggest an equal priority.

If this topic is to be discussed in detail in the next committee meeting, and if I am at some future date to be involved, I request to be present for the discussion.

Further, until HAVA makes a move in the direction I have outlined here, in terms of the full time assignment of capable personnel to the task, there is not much I could do to help in organizing the laborers, a HAVA action. In the near future, HAVA/AID intend to interview the remaining landowning farmer/settlers in the block to be developed with on-farm drains in the Gowargi, Shamalan area using the FES interview schedules. I could check on the situation at that time.

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