

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

TO : The Files

DATE: April 12, 1977

FROM : Richard B. Scott, DP

SUBJECT: Land Betterment and Settler Services in the Helmand Valley: A Project Proposal for Implementation in Conjunction with the Helmand Drainage Project at Some Time during Phase II

References: 1. My memos and papers:

a. "HAVA Priority of Land Settlement and the Central Helmand Drainage Project," 30 June 1975;

b. "Rural Development and Government Priorities in Land Settlement," January 8, 1977;

c. "Social Analysis," in Helmand Drainage Project PP, 1975 and 1976.

2. "Request to the UN/FAO World Food Programme for Assistance in a Project for Economic and Social Development," Ministry of Planning, December 1976;

3. "Settlement Programme: Observations on Existing Programme and Recommendations for Future Planning and Implementation," Alfred L. Cardman, FAO Consultant, 17 December 1975.

4. "Advisory Report to the Ministry of Interior on Land Settlement and Related Problems," V. Webster Johnson, Consultant USAID, May 1967.

This memo outlines a possible new project for the Helmand Valley which would be an attachment to or expansion of the activities of the Helmand Drainage Project at some time in the future. This is a follow-up on previous discussions within the Mission on support of the government activities in land settlement.

Rationale:

An examination of the referenced documents can result in the conclusions: The COA has established land settlement as a major socio-political priority for some years past, has expanded accelerated the activity since the change of government in 1973 and is planning to continue this expanded effort into the next 5 - 7 years, with or without foreign aid. Further, the present activity has major problems in national policy, planning and implementation that date back at least 9 years, probably more: organizational problems (see references 3 and 4).



This land settlement priority has major political implications for the GOA including (in the most general terms) nation-building, political stability and reform, i.e., it is very important to the GOA and continues to be immediate in nature. Further, these are goals, developments or changes which the U.S. very strongly supports.

As a target population, the settlers fit the AID Congressional Mandate to develop projects that help the rural poor. The settlers certainly fall into the category of the rural very poor. Their poorness, combined with the general low level of government services available, makes successful or quick adjustment to settlement difficult, and probably increases drop-out rates. For example, they do not qualify for basic Agricultural Bank loans. They commonly do not own sufficient farm implements or oxen, necessary to actively farm. They generally do not have the available cash to rent tractors for plowing. So, they drift into debt in the opening stages of settlement, commonly become involved in some sort of share-crop arrangements on their own land or perhaps drop out of the program. These are the problems of the rural poor.

The settlers would be classed as small farmers in need of support during the early years of settlement. In the Helmand, they receive (since 1973-74) 10 jeribs of land in contrast to the up-to 30 jeribs received in the early settlement period 25 years ago. And they receive none of the earlier settler advantages of housing, food programs, agricultural implements and fully prepared farm land. The exact extent of agricultural extension services available is not known but the assumption should be that they are very limited for most new settlers.

Finally, with a few notable exceptions, the accelerated nature of the settlement activities has resulted in the placement of farmers on undeveloped land; land that was previously unfarmed, has the most rudimentary irrigation and drainage systems (read inadequate), and in most cases not leveled.

The rationale for USAID involvement in the settler program seems clear: the program is an active GOA priority; it is in need of help in planning and implementation; and the people to benefit are among the poorest of the rural poor in need of a variety of services if they are to make quick adjustment into their new life-way and become productive farmers rather than national liabilities.

Proposed Activity

The settlement program is national in scope but it would probably be an error to become involved in the national program as such. The old DAP strategy of initial limited involvement with a limited scope project still applies.

The Helmand Valley is a most likely place for the proposed USAID involvement in the settlement activity since: it is a region of a continuing settlement program; there is a long-term, experienced Settlement Department within the HAVA organization, as well as a staffed Agricultural Extension Service and other service organizations that require mobilizing vis-a-vis the settler scheme; it is a region with some data base; and USAID has experience as well as an ongoing project and facilities in the area.

The Helmand Drainage Project is focused on at least four work areas that are made up of settlers (two long-term settler areas -- Nad-i-Ali and Marja; and two recent settler areas -- Gowargi-Shamalan and Darwashan). The project is focused on drainage problems only in areas with many other perhaps just as important problems, i.e., lack of credit, unlevel land, water shortage due to indigenous water control systems. With the introduction of a water management/farmer information technician in Phase II of the project, the scope of the project will broaden and these other problems will emerge as part of the project context. But presently, although the project is working mainly with settlers, the limited scope does not allow for a recognition of settler problems per se. For example, in the Shamalan-Gowargi area USAID is constructing drains across farmers' land, many of whom complain that they are water-short (conflict with area indigenous mirab) and unable to get water to parts of their unlevel land. Many are in debt or on some share-crop arrangement and do not own their own oxen. The drop-out rate may be as high as 10 percent. (See Phase II Project Paper Social Analysis.)

Logically, these sorts of issues should be addressed by the Drainage Project, i.e., "Not by drainage alone..." At various times during project development this more general issue of a broader scope (not settler focus) has been raised but to retain project simplicity (a good idea since there are apparent major problems of timely implementation of the simplest present) has not been addressed. The new technician for Phase II, noted above, will face some of these problems in the context of his work in any case.

As noted in Ref. 1.a., HAVA has land settlement as a priority. Drainage is part of land preparation for settlement, especially the layout and construction of main drains through previously unused areas. Informal requests have been made of present Drainage Project staff for help with some of this work. It may be best to officially recognize the context within which the project is functioning, support a HAVA priority and work toward an eventual focus on this real problem of the rural poor new settlers.)

Proposal

In its most briefly outlined form, the proposal is to develop a staged, simple project of land preparation for settlers followed by after-settlement training and services. Some elements of the proposed settler project would be:

a. Influence the policy on the amount of farm land necessary to have something other than a subsistence farm. This would vary from soil to soil but certainly the 10 - 12 jeribs (5-6 acres) presently being given is not adequate, given the crops being grown. No major assumptions of shifting of crops to gain greater income should be made but new cash crops should be one focus of the related agricultural research-extension activities.

The present system of very small plots for settlers, combined with other negative elements, will result in subsistence level farmers in this generation, for those who stay, and a pattern of migration for the next generation, i.e., the settlement program presently tends to be an immediate, short-term solution to a perceived political situation. The goal is to get some land to landless farmers, and it may be assumed that the farmers are anxious to participate in the program but have no great expectations of an efficiently run program.

b. Land, irrigation and drainage systems preparation should be a first step in putting settlers on the land. In observed areas of Helmand where the new program has been in operation, these most important elements apparently have been given little attention. Settlers have been put on land previously rated as Class 6 land by the Bureau of Reclamation, i.e., unirrigable or soil so poor that it was not considered economical to develop. They have been put on land that has not been smoothed in any way and requires major movement of soils, something the farmers can do given a lot of time, which they do not have in terms of quick adjustment to the new life, or a lot of money, which they do not have. For example: settlers in the Darwshan project area, with the 10 - 12 jeribs of land, were interviewed in their second and third crop year and were found to have only been able to level and plant 2 - 3 jeribs of their new land. The settler attrition rates for this area are unknown but appear, according to farmer statements, to be high.

There were additional problems with the socio-agricultural context within which the farmers were settled. Irrigation water is drawn from already-established water systems and the water resources, being limited, are operated and guarded by already-established populations. If anyone goes short, it will be the recent settler. In most cases, the settlers come with no income, little if any capital and rarely an ox for

plowing. The alternatives for land preparation, plowing, frequently include renting a tractor, if there is cash, in some way giving a share of the future crop from the plowing, or going into debt at very high rates of interest to local money lenders.

c. As just noted, a source of low interest credit is necessary to support the settlers through the first few years of settlement. Their resources, by definition, are very limited. They are the rural poor. The combination of debts incurred in moving from one area to another, establishing a household, meeting all monetary needs with past savings (which in most cases are probably nil), and attempting to get the first crops planted can result in farmer household economic disaster for a good proportion of a man's lifetime. As noted, they do not qualify for most classes, of loans from the Agricultural Bank which requires a 10 percent payment on the item to be bought and/or someone to guarantee the loan in the area of settlement. Since the settler is new in the area, is not always welcomed by the already established population, it is difficult to get a local landowner who does not know the settler, to guarantee a loan. By any standards, given the details outlined above, the new settler is not a good credit risk. But at least half the risk has been generated by the settlement situation itself. The settler requires credit support.

d. Agricultural support services like extension, to train farmers into perhaps new farming conditions from those they are used to, must be established. For example, the settlement of Ozbeks from Takhar in the desert area of Darwasha will require changes of agricultural cultural practices. The organization of water control and distribution systems and committees and training in on-farm water management must be established. While the introduction of new crops should be considered, the maximum production levels of wheat would be the main, first focus.

e. Housing, Health and Education facilities should be established in the new area of settlement. The farmers, as noted, will have little capital with which to establish themselves and minimum political influence to effect the level of services. In part, this element of the proposed project could be supported by both the Rural Schools Project and the Basic Health Project.

IN CONCLUSION, this memo is slightly disjointed and repetitive in places, but spells out the details of the problems faced by new settlers and the rationale for USAID involvement in the activity. The proposed activity would be limited in scope, geographically, and in terms of project activity, especially in the early phases which could probably best focus on the technical details of land preparation, to be followed

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in later phases by the services elements. No attempt has been made to outline personnel requirements to implement the proposed activity but they could be minimal in the initial stage when combined with the present overlap activities in operation. The first steps in project development would be:

1. Staffing out the details of the proposal with personnel from Program Office, CDE, SCS and Agriculture to consider feasibility, i.e., a DAC meeting.

2. Contact elements within the GOA (e.g., Planning and perhaps HAVA) to see if there would be interest in USAID involvement with the settler program, specifically in the Helmand.

Finally, I would be most interested in being involved in any and all meetings relating to the above outline proposal and in project development if it ever reached that stage.

cc:

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