

The Shamalan Land Development Project: An Introduction

This section focuses on the district officially called Nawa-i-Barakzai, or Shamalan or, presently Nawa. It is located in the flood plain on the western side of the Helmand River across from Lashkar Gah and has been settled, irrigated and farmed for centuries. The land holdings through the district are highly fragmented, irregular in shapes and sizes and irrigated off a multitude of traditional and irregular ditches. The area is inhabited by a large number of tribal and ethnic groups that have settled through the centuries, the most numerous perhaps being the Barakzai. Before the development work of MKA in the 1940s and 50s, and the construction of the Boghra Canal, this area was irrigated off locally built and maintained intakes off the river. The Shamalan canal, which is a branch off the Boghra canal, was constructed by MKA and has an alignment more or less down the middle of the flood plain and follows what was said to have been one of the main original arteries through at least the north end of Shamalan but left much of South Shamalan water short and un-farmed. Side note: Shamalan is/was a small village at the south end of the district after which the region was called during this work period.

The idea of a Shamalan irrigation and development program began in the mid-1960s with a feasibility study to be found in the website. To begin, the program was to initiate a demonstration development project in the first 200+ acres at the north end of the district. It was proposed to remove the farmers off the land to perhaps temporary housing on the desert escarpment to the west, (to be organized by CARE), initiate precise land leveling which would take out the traditional system of irrigation ditches mostly lined with trees, removing housing, vineyards and orchards in the process. The flat flood plain was considered too valuable to include housing. There was to be land consolidation in this highly fragmented area so that each land owner would end with one plot equal in size to the several he might have previously owned, squared off with irrigation ditches along the boundaries. The assumption was that when the farmers saw the results of this demonstration project, the entire Shamalan could be “modernized”. It did not happen.

In addition, the S-10.7 lateral was to be built as a branch off the Shamalan at the very north end of the district along the desert western escarpment allowing more effective irrigation and bringing water into the water short areas in the south which would result in new land settlement, always a government priority. There was to be a large heavy equipment component of the project bringing in modern earth moving equipment like self-loading scrapers and new dozers to replace much of the aging and scrapped MKA equipment from the '40s and 50s. (Into the 2000s, at least one of the MKA draglines was still in use.)

In the end, work in the demonstration area was never started due to farmer unwillingness to participate. The heavy equipment was brought in as planned, the S-10.7 lateral was completed and new land was settled and is being farmed in the south.

This section offers many but not all the documents relating to this project and attempts to spell out many of the problems faced in implementation. There are gaps in the documentation in time and coverage for this project. Many documents are unscannable

being carbon copies or Xeroxed copies of copies. Some are and will be re-typed. And like the rest of the website, the collection of the documents is a continuing process.