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Further Studies in the Shamalan Valley

Reference: Memo April 3, 1971 Comments on Programs

1. Between 14 April and 19 April 1971 more villagers (about 15) of the Shamalan Valley were interviewed in an attempt to get a more complete picture of their attitudes, and reasons for their attitudes, toward the Shamalan project than that reported earlier. While the general views stated in the previous report were supported by these more recent contacts, greater variation in answers began to appear with the wider choice of sample interviewed. Most of the present sample were contacted while accompanying an artificial insemination team on a regularly scheduled route through the project area. The sample was mainly composed of those men who had cows in heat on a particular day, who had knowledge of the service offered, and a willingness to use it.

Besides the previous questions about the villagers' knowledge of and attitude toward the project, more questions were aimed at getting some detailed information on the indigenous power relations in the area as they effect or could effect the workings of the project. A clear statement of these relations will be necessary for each area developed if there is to be hope of coping with the numerous problems that will no doubt arise, including the most basic problem of water management. As in the previous report, the emphasis here is on knowing and understanding the socio-political context within which the project must function. Without such information and some system to maintain a flow of supplementary information as the project develops, we will likely face some rather unpleasant surprises.

2. General Comments: While considering the details of this report, we must keep in mind at least three influences on villagers attitudes. First, the villagers seem to have a general distrust, and lack of confidence in government officials and their projects. This would include any and all projects in which AID may be involved. Much of this skepticism seems to be based on past contacts and experiences, within the context of how the

villagers define events. For example, one landowner argued that the up-hill placement of the new canal would lead to major drainage, salting and water-logging problems experienced by areas presently on the down-hill side of the old canal. And several men indicated that with the re-arrangements of fields, re-surveying, etc. they were sure to lose land for a variety of reasons. Some because, as previously noted, they were using government land illegally. This not only includes the Khans but also some small farmers, owning no land, who would be classed as squatters. Others noted that the larger number of new ditches would cut into farm land. Others were less specific, since they were dealing with the unknown, but they had the feeling they might lose part or all of their land.

Second, the area to be developed is presently an area being, in village terms, successfully and profitably farmed. According to both the 1965 and the recent farm economic surveys, Shamalan Valley is one of the most productive areas in the region. Although technically the Shamalan Valley may be sub-standard, it is going to be difficult to convince villagers, who see their farming activities as successful, that they should give up a growing season and become involved in the unknown.

Third, the project will be functioning in an area with a relatively stable indigenous socio-political system apparently primarily based on relationships between large landowners and various sorts of tenant farmers, discussed below. At least some of the villagers see this project as in some way disruptive to this indigenous system. Certainly, if the project is to be technically successful, some parts of the system must change, i.e., water management. We must expect blocks by the vested interest groups, i.e., Khans. We might also expect that some of these blocks will manifest themselves in less direct ways, via share-croppers, mullahs, etc. In any case, the Shamalan Valley project is not likely to proceed without interruptions and other difficulties. Detailed and continuous knowledge of each development block will aid in predicting problems before they occur and aid in settling disputes afterward.

3. Information: To this time no villager has been found who has had any direct contact with the government officials about the outline of the project. That is, little if any public relations activities have been carried out on the part of the government except for possibly the early initial contacts by the Governor with a few large Khans of the upper end of the Valley (see my previous report). Besides this, there have been several groups of Khans to come to the city to discuss the project with the Governor in recent months but these meetings were primarily in the form of stating objections to beginning the work; this is according to the adult son of one such Khan.

And apparently the Afghan survey crews have instructions not to discuss their activities with villagers.

One reason for this procedure of non-enlightenment might stem from the traditional middle-eastern bureaucratic view that villagers opinions are unimportant because they are too ignorant to understand what is good for them in the first place. Only the power figures in an area need be consulted; thus the meeting with the Khans. A second reason could be that as long as no one knows anything and no one begins the actual socially disruptive activities of land consolidation and leveling, peace can be maintained. This last can only last so long, until the project does get into the field.

The objection to the suggestion made by Mr. Shankian that some sort of large scale public information campaign should be started, possibly in the form of a valley-wide information meeting or fair was interesting. The idea being that in some central place with the help of visual aids and informed technical and political staff the project could be adequately explained and all questions accurately answered. The counter proposal was that when the time comes the agriculture agents would be told to inform the villagers. Again, in middle eastern terms, this amounts to the present situation, that is, limited if not inaccurate explanations to those villagers the agent feels need to know. In at least one case, of a non-Pashto speaking agent who did not know of the hoof and mouth outbreak in his district (reflecting his levels of contact), to depend only on the agriculture agent would be a mistake. It is not likely that there are any agriculture agents capable of giving a full explanation of the details of the project in reference to land consolidation and the other more complicated aspects of the plan. The quality and content of the information must be homogenous across the valley as villagers have a tendency and the occasion to cross-check their information.

Some sort of a district meeting seems called for if we expect the bulk of the population to know what is happening. One disadvantage of this sort of meeting is that any organized or spontaneous group hostility might get public expression.

The lack of information is reflected in the wide variety of rumors in the area about the project. The most prevalent being found among the large number of share-croppers interviewed. In contrast to the responses reported three weeks earlier, there was much support for the project among this group but possibly for the wrong reason. The rumor was that landless farmers were to be given land by the project under a free redistribution system. If the Khans believe this, we are in for some strong opposition. The general

present philosophy of the theory of the "Limited good" being at work; that is, there is only so much "good" in the world (in this case land) and one person's gain occurs only at the expense of someone else (Foster). In other parts of the middle-east, however, such rumors have been spread by government simply to reduce the opposition or gain support at a particular time. It is uncertain as to the source of the rumor or how long it has been present. It was present over nearly the full length of the valley, if our limited sample is any indication, and the villagers interviewed three weeks earlier did not make such responses.

The traditional pattern of communication between government and villagers in the Islamic world has been of a limited nature and similar to the present pattern, contact with the power figures or their representatives. But also this contact has primarily involved three activities; collection of taxes, conscription of soldiers and maintenance of order. Rarely has it involved a realistic cooperative effort to improve the lot of the villagers. Cooperation cannot be expected from villagers who are uninformed.

A second point on the problems of communication is that we tend to assume that the local bureaucracy is fully aware of what is going on at the village level. I have no way at present to evaluate this assumption but if it is true, it will be one of the rare exceptions to the rule of middle-eastern-islamic cultural area bureaucratic ignorance of village level affairs. This is not to condemn this enforced ignorance which is functional in the context of central, national governments that insist on passing frequently irrelevant and unenforceable laws at the village level. But again this ignorance becomes dysfunctional in the more recent context of development projects.

If the hypothesis is accepted that complete information must be disseminated to the villagers via a large scale public relations activity of some sort, insuring that all the people receive accurate and consistent information, the following list of items is a partial coverage of the kinds of questions to be answered.

A. Land consolidation must be explained in full, the principles and reasons for it. If the highly fragmented land holdings, separated by rather great distances, are to be consolidated into one single unit, a system must be devised of consolidating parcels located in areas to be developed at different times. How this is to be done must be clearly explained.

Land consolidation will limit the mobility of some villages or hamlets.

(see previous report.) The greater plan might attempt to eliminate this mobility all together since, in time, it is likely to affect the work of land leveling. The building and periodic destruction of mud-bat villages requires the displacement of relatively large amounts of soil.

Since government land is apparently available in most of the development blocks, it may be useful to examine the possibility of establishing the villages on government land (the settlement of houses) rather than on the privately owned land as at present. This could be more efficiently combined with the school program, and necessarily with a more active public health and sanitation scheme. For example, some system of relatively pure drinking water might be devised, via wells, in stable villages to replace the use of water from the ditches. The problem, then, would become how to get the people to change and, secondly, how to keep the wells uncontaminated.

B. Displaced farmers, of various sorts, must know in detail what will happen to them while the land is being leveled. The plan apparently includes paying farmers for land out of production. But this is too simple of a statement to satisfy all the farmers. Each development section will have to be examined by the planners and technicians to be able to tell the farmers of that block what will happen to their fields, houses, etc. Will this group of trees, orchard and vineyard be leveled or not? Generalized statements can easily satisfy planners but each farmer wants to know if his vineyard is to be leveled. This suggests that the public relations scheme should be first general but very quickly become specific to a particular area. An individual may be helped to cope with bad news; the unknown is a completely different problem.

If the area were an absolutely homogeneous area relative to crops, the problems would be relatively simple. But we are dealing with a certain level of subsistence agriculture which produces a surplus. This may seem a contradiction of terms unless we keep in mind that the surplus produced by many farmers (various grades of share-croppers) cannot be kept for themselves. In any case, as noted previously, small land owners not only plant wheat but pulses, melons, alfalfa, etc. They grow wheat for consumption by the household and to pay debts. They grow alfalfa as a forage crop for their milk and work cattle. In two hamlets of Aynak, at least, landlords let share-croppers use land for forage crops for animals. What explanation is to be given to farmers whose forage crops are going to be out of production for at least a year? Will they be paid for the lack of forage crop or provided hay from other regions? We might expect the price of hay to go up as development areas go out of production.

In terms of physical displacement, where are the farmers to be moved as areas are developed. Again rumor has it that they may be given land in Marja, either permanently or temporarily. Others say they simply will have to move. The concept of a government or community owned village site could help reduce this problem.

The last question under this heading relates to who will be paid for land out of cultivation? Although there seems limited data on exactly who owns the land, the impression is that the money for land out of production will be paid to the relatively few Khang (relative to the larger numbers of share-croppers). In probing this question, the share-cropper respondents had no illusions about what would happen. When they were not producing a crop to share, they would receive nothing from the landlord, except in the form of loans which traditionally have deepened the dependency on and therefore the power of the patron (Khang). Some said they would leave the area to find land to farm elsewhere. In planning the social implications of such projects, these sorts of results must be weighed carefully, before the project is on the ground. The question to answer here is, would it be feasible to pay the actual owner only part of the value of the lost crop and the rest to go to the one who works the land? The possibilities of the complexity of such a program are staggering.

A more far reaching and more speculative result can be predicted to be in the mill for the future; the displacement of the large number of share-croppers in the area. The credit project is seeing results in financing the sale of tractors in the valley. Presently the numbers are small but the enthusiasm for the machines is great. Land-lords with tenant farmers are about the only ones able to meet the qualifications for the loans; a quantity of land larger than a family with work animals can bring under the plow alone. Land consolidation which will result from the development scheme will maximize conditions for the displacement of tenant farmers; that is, a landlord (possibly with a tractor) with his land in one block rather than fragmented as at the present time. The landlord will have little need for the numbers of share-croppers he now supports. Economically, he will be simply reducing his costs.

This list of questions that the public relations activity must be aimed at is only partial. The suggestions on how they should be answered is only tentative. There are always technical, legal and financial limitations of what can be done. Although it is late in the game, knowledgeable representatives of these and others involved disciplines should meet to thrash out what answers can be given to these questions. Apparently the plan for these aspects of the Shamalan Valley development was "to play it by ear." While maximum flexibility is a pre-requisite, given the variation we can expect

as we move down the valley, a basic structure of action must be established, or the villagers will never let the technical plan get off the drawing board.

4. The power structure at the village level must be analyzed in each of the districts to be developed. The statements made here will necessarily be general and rather superficial. Variation was found from one section of the valley to the other. Thus, the sorts of difficulties the project could face will vary accordingly. The problem considered here is the relationships between the three roles that seem key in understanding the power structure and in particular how it affects the irrigation development scheme; (1) THE LOCAL Khans or landowners-patrons, (2) the Mirabs or water controllers who distribute the water to the farmers, (3) the Muliks or the village representative to the government. One of the present justifications for the Shamsian Valley project is that one end of the valley is being adequately, if technically crudely, irrigated, while the other end is faced with water shortages. My estimation of the situation, spelled out in more detail below, is that unless the power structure as it relates to water distribution is not altered, the results of the technically more efficient scheme will be nullified. Water distribution must be taken out of the hands of the local power structure and placed under the control of neutral, unaffiliated government civil servants; a possibly unrealistic demand at the present time.

Except for outer fringe areas and sections of immigrant groups, the dominant pattern of land ownership in the Shamsian Valley appears to be that of Khans owning from 100 to 400 jiribs of land with hamlets, located on their land, comprised of various sorts of share-croppers and farm laborers (see my earlier report). The actual distribution of the sorts of owners, and detailed definitions of the sorts of share-croppers and laborers can be found in the forthcoming farm economic survey by Dr. G. E. Owens of the Wyoming Group, whose findings are based on scientific sampling procedures. A wealthier Khan (one with more land) may have more than one hamlet under his patronage. In at least one case, in the Belan district, (upper Shamsian) the Khan lived outside the project area. The size of his holdings were unknown. The men control the basis of production, the land, and so have considerable political power. That is, they can demand the support of those who are dependent, share-croppers, laborers and attached relatives. The Khan is not only the source of the means of production but may act as a leader for those households facing various economic crisis or a shortage of wheat during the year.

The Malik is the villagers representative vis-a-vis the government in all official business, therefore, in theory he has a potentially great amount of power. He may or may not see that the farmer's interests are best served. He gets paid, apparently, by the individuals he acts for. In regions where the population is located in concentrated settlements, he would be a village headman but in this more fragmented settlement pattern, he may represent a district or area of the valley. His representation may be more highly fragmented, as stated by two Khans in central Aynak, by being tribal rather than strictly area representative. Further, there are individuals who are referred to as Maliks who represent social or economic groups (as share-croppers) rather than the previously cited geographical and political groupings. It is unknown as to how many of these types of Maliks are government recognized and how many are unofficial spokesmen and "lobbyists" in the government offices in Lash. In theory the Malik is chosen or "elected" by the group he represents but in practice he is apparently chosen by the dominant Khan or Khans of a particular area. The examples found were said to be small landholders but under the domination of the local Khans. In a few cases, the Khans themselves were the Maliks. The point being that a second source of power and influence (government) is not uncommonly combined in the hands of the Khans.

The final role, which also dovetails into this structure is the Mirab, the man who sees to the distribution of water to the farmers' fields. The examples found of this role were of two sorts, small landowners appointed or chosen by the local Khan or Khans, and the Khan himself holding the position. This is not to say that the Mirab himself does the work, he has ~~responsibility~~ to do the actual water distribution but he gets paid by each farmer (according to the locals) and his area of control may or may not coincide with the other spheres of influence. One Khan, or his representative, may act as Mirab for another Khan; and if the hostility voiced by a Khan of central Aynak against his Mirab is any indication, there is opportunity for disagreement over water. But, again, we have the potential, or the likelihood, that some Khans' influence and power is increased by his control of water in this irrigated area. With this overlap of spheres of potential power, a Khan would not only be able to demand the support of those directly under his patronage as laborers and share-croppers but also other small farmers that are dependent upon him, or his representative, for representation vis-a-vis the government. The Khan might also be in a position to see that a small farmer could be left water short.

A question we must answer when evaluating the present water situation in Shamalan is how much of the water shortage is based on political relations (relations between groups) and how much is based on a true lack of water. Beginning in central Aynak we found villagers saying that they were water short but farther down the valley, beyond Friday Market, a fringe of immigrant, small landowner, farmers indicated they had no shortage. The reason for this difference is unknown but water shortage is apparently not simply a function location from the originating source.

An example of the sorts of Khans influence possible was found on a small (2-3 acres) farm being operated on government land which the farmer himself had leveled and improved, apparently over a number of years. He said that while he was an independent farmer operating on government land illegally, he was required to pay a proportion of his crop to two different Khans who had land around him. Given the structure described above, he has very little choice.

In some of the farmers minds the development project is associated with control of the water. A few small farmers did indicate that they supported the project because it would mean they would then get enough water, and that one of the reasons the Khans were against it was that they presently got at least their share of the water, and why would they want to change. An approximate quote coming via an interpreter from one such small farmer was, "If the project depends on the Khans, it will never go through because the ones presently getting the water will never let it happen."

An independent farmer of lower Aynak with 50 jiribs of land made a similar statement of the situation saying he was short of water because of the Khans over use. He supported the project because he assumed it would include water control.

We might conclude from this, as in the opening statements, that strict water control must be a part of the total scheme and certainly part of the public relations activity. Water control does not mean that the Khans will be left with inadequate water but that everyone gets his share, which will be adequate. It would mean, however, that water would stop being a tool of political influence.

Many of the statements in this report are in the form of hypothesis. More systematic study needs to be done, particularly focusing on the structure of the areas being developed. Very little is mentioned about tribal arrangements since such information is not easily nor quickly come by. It may in fact be pointless to attempt to discuss the above inter-relationships outside the context of the tribes. How the religious structure ties in with the politico-economic structure is also an unknown, that is, the ties between the Mullahs and the Khans. My guess would be that the Khans influence the Mullahs in much the same way as they do the others.

To close, some of my information on the status of the project is out of date. My main interest is to stress the importance of understanding the structure, in detail, with which we must work. At the same time, the people must know what we plan to do and be willing to enter into a dialog over the plan. Thus our plan must be technically sound and able, through prior planning or flexibility, to meet the immediate as well as the more distant needs of the population. The project will be faced with numerous difficulties since it certainly involves changing if not reducing some individual's positions of power and influence, and possibly level of wealth in the immediate future. We must be in a position to understand the basis of the difficulties to be able to find solutions.

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