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The North Shamalan: A Survey of Land and People

This report presents some detailed information on the nature of the population that lives in, works or owns the first 2.7 kilometers of the north end of the Shamalan project area. It describes the nature of land ownership and the agreements by which the land is worked. It gives some indication of land use. Some descriptive information is given on the system of water management in the area. An attempt is made to indicate how this information relates directly to the needs of the Shamalan project, including something on farmers' attitudes toward the project. The report states the need for further studies if the project is not to be faced with continued unpredictable problems.

Until the summer of 1971, the social implications of the project had been to a large degree officially ignored, at least in terms of overt action. There is little doubt that this policy, if it is a policy, could be followed throughout the life of the project and the project still be completed. But I speculate that it could lead to untimely delays, maximum levels of frustration, and an embittered population, which we may be faced with in any case.

To date, there has been some attempt to get the extension agents involved in informing the farmers about the project. The Governor had previously made contact with some district leaders in an attempt to elicit support for the project. It is likely that after the incident of protest on the North Shamalan on about September 3, the Governor has been holding further discussions. The flow of objectors to the project has apparently continued to come to Lashkar Gah. And last, a local politician from Belan arrived from Kabul at the request of the Governor to discuss, probably with the village leadership groups and his relatives, the idea that they should not object too loudly. His contact centered mainly in the districts from which he originated and he did not make contacts further down the valley.

My evaluation of the situation is that the authorities have yet to bring the project to the bulk of the people in any meaningful way. It would be interesting to know what those understand about the project who have already given title for the right-of-way. In short, I conclude that there has been some movement on the surface to inform at least the few it seems worthwhile to inform about some level of detail about the project.

Under the most simple interpretation of Title LX of the 1967 Foreign Assistance Act, we are expected to carefully consider the social and political implications of

all our projects, to "...recognize the differing needs, desires, and capacities of the people..." (Section 281 (a) (1)), to insure that they participate fully in the development process. This means that all projects must be evaluated in terms of the people to be affected as well as in terms of technical efficiency. We do not appear to be doing this very effectively in the Shamalan, at least vis-a-vis the local farmers.

While our major input into the Shamalan project is in the form of funding, the responsibility for the success or failure of the project, with all the possibilities for intra-national and inter-national political propaganda at all phases of development, will accrue to USAID. And success or failure will not be measured simply by production figures.

Similar involvements in the past in the Helmand Valley have resulted in a source of continued fodder in the barrages of negative propaganda against our involvement in at least this country. Some of these (i. e. Nad-i-All) appear to be approaching, after some years, the original goals. In any case, we can hardly afford to continue to be involved in such programs. The careful study of all aspects of a situation, and especially the people who are supposed to be involved, will go far to reduce the likelihood of yet another such involvement.

In the Shamalan, and all other projects we support, we must carefully monitor these social implications and insure that the involved local government officials act and organize a system of development that involves the people affected to a maximum extent. We must not assume that such a development will occur simply because the officials appear to share our values. It is very likely that they do not. There is no tradition in central governments of the Muslim world to actively solicit the support or cooperation of local populations in development. It is not being done in the present case, as far as we can tell. There should be requirements attached to all of our loans that spell out our demands for local involvement if we are to fund particular projects and withdraw funds when our expectations are not met.

At a more general level we must ask ourselves about policy as it relates to how particular projects affect local populations. What level of agreement is necessary, not from the government but from the people, on a project before we support it? As in our own country, certain kinds of development can be done with little or no agreement from those most directly affected, e. g. , the building of highways across private property and building dams in places that put some people's land under water. These are projects that bring a greater "good" to the society in general and involve the acquisition of land by the rule of eminent domain. The Shamalan project and other similar schemes do not fall in this category, however. This is a land area

being successfully farmed thru an irrigation scheme that may not be technically perfect but by local definitions of most farmers is adequate. Little new land will be farmed under the scheme. Thus, the level of agreement among the local farmers must be much greater since it is a disruptive project that will affect no one other than those whose economic activity will be disrupted.

In a very small F. A. O. irrigation proposal, in a small up-lands valley in South Turkey, that a group of villagers had requested, a land survey was completed, a plan for land consolidation developed, and a public information program instituted that explained to each farmer how the project would affect him. A general vote was held on the issue and a 10% negative response was allowed. The required level of agreement was not met so the project was dropped. In terms of the social and political implications of our involvement in programs, expected levels of resistance, and the required levels of cooperation when dealing with something like land consolidation, it would seem prudent that U. S. A. I. D. establish some similar policy in the case of this type project.

There is much in the literature on development processes about the importance of recognizing the traditional forms of social structure and organization. We might assume that present Afghan government approaches to the population of the Shamalan follow such traditional patterning. Basically it has similarities to the bureaucratic approach of the past Ottoman Empire and can be seen in most countries, to some degree, throughout the Middle East-Muslim world. The point is, however, that this project assumes much greater levels of participation than is expected in a traditional system. Some more modern methods must be instituted in terms of information and acceptance. I doubt that we could get high levels of acceptance by the local population even if they were fully informed and the terms of the change were idealistically simple and rewarding, which they are not. The starting point here is, then, that we have a project that is being implemented and we want to do at least two things in the process: keep the people informed as to what is happening which should reduce some of the tensions produced through ignorance of what is being done; establish some system through which we as implementors can keep informed as to what is happening among the locals in terms of attitudes and changes, and complaints about events associated with the project.

Recommendations

1. HAVA must establish a comprehensive information program which includes but is not limited to the extension agents' activities, to keep the people informed of the project's activities and goals. This would be a generalized public information

activity as well as one whose function it would be to explain to the individual farmer how the project is to affect him. This would mean the establishment of a public information section, preferably headed by someone from the region with some experience in communications, extension, public health work, etc. He might find valuable assistance from Peace Corps volunteers. This is not something to be accomplished in a day or a month but a continuous activity during the life of the Shamalan project. It is further not an activity which would be secondary to any already established group but a newly established unit with responsibility to inform every level of Shamalan society what is happening and what the plans for the future involve. It might be a section of the extension service but clearly with this responsibility as its raison d'etre.

Such a unit would have to have access to information and personnel from any other section of HAVA to carry out its job.

2. There must be a continual research activity carried on by HAVA which would produce information on the nature of the population about to be affected. If we do not have a relatively clear picture of the nature of the landholdings, residence patterns, proportions of landowners versus sharecroppers, and something of the local indigenous political structure, we can expect continual unpredictable problems. This activity should also maintain an awareness of farmers' attitudes toward the project and any changes occurring. This activity should be able to monitor any rumors that might generate through fact, ignorance or misinformation and, in cooperation with or as part of the information program, find remedies. It appears that we have maintained a relatively high level of ignorance about the local population of Shamalan and their attitudes, or, if we have had knowledge, we have ignored the facts. If we are not to continue to be faced with unpleasant surprises, the project needs a social research and planning arm for as long as the field work continues. Such an arm was needed from the earliest stages of feasibility and planning for Shamalan.

3. Other than by appeals to the Governor, there should be some system or committee established by HAVA for airing and finding solutions to farmers' grievances. This would be in addition to the land claims courts that have a somewhat specialized interest. Since the grievances and their solution affect the position of USAID as much as that of the Afghan government, we must also have a representative in the solution of these problems. If a grievance committee were established it must have power to act in solving problems and not simply be another symbolic committee of our well wishes. Such a group might include a respected member of a Said family (of the religious institution, non-government) whose function traditionally has been to find solutions to local problems (settling feuds, etc.). While it might complicate administration, this addition would give the needed confidence in the group to the local farmers.