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Comments on Programs

After four weeks in the country and one week here, it is not likely that my comments will be particularly penetrating or profound. Of the various programs commented on, however, questions are raised and general frame-of-reference comments are made. Hopefully, you may find them helpful.

1. Broader range of programs: The expanded program, as briefly outlined in the various papers and memos (including health, primary education, literacy, home economics, etc.) reflects many standard assumptions about the process of development acted upon by USAID in many parts of the world, with varying degrees of success and failure. The question to be asked of any one of these extensions of service (and each should be examined individually) is: How does it fit into the socio-economic context at present? What is the demand for such an extension of services, or what is the likely reaction (a reflection of perceived usefulness) to such an extension if it is offered? Regardless of how ill-fit a program is to the local context, some segment or segments of any community might be expected to accept the proposed service, but this is not the goal. Various brief surveys and observations are necessary to establish the usefulness of these sorts of services vis-a-vis the local populations.

For example, primary schools in the area appear to be well attended, at least by the males, which indicates a demand, although it may not be verbalized. On the other hand, the proposed home economics program may not have the same demand; I have no way of knowing. The suggestion that the wives of the Agricultural Agents be used to put this program in the field may be useful to supplement those households' incomes but it is not likely to lead to a successful program. Personnel that know what must be done and are willing and able to do it, is another key to meaningful projects. Unless such personnel are available it is more realistic to never begin the project.

In short, the expanded range of programs must be examined carefully in terms of the local context, not in terms of the institutions we see as being useful to the development picture if they were accepted by the locals, our frame-of-reference.

2. The Shamalan Project: From the various discussions I have had with Government and villagers, there has not been a clear, consistent picture of the details of how the project is to function. This includes numerous statements from villagers in the area who seem to be the least informed. The number of villagers contacted admittedly was small, between 15-20, but some indications of potential problem areas were clear; the first, just mentioned, being that the people to be affected most by the project have not been subjected to any sort of long-term contact-explanation, i.e. public relations. Several I talked to, for example, had no clear understanding of what land consolidation involved.

The stated reactions from the various levels of the village system have ranged from indifference (tenant farmers), to negative (landowners, large and small), to an unwillingness to discuss the project; this last being the least healthy sign. The landowning Khans interviewed (heads of small villages or hamlets which carry their names) are not apparently the wealthiest or most powerful but had between 100 and 200 jiribs.

I gather that the Governor has approved the project and has indicated that the people of the area support it. It would be interesting to know the source of his information. According to two small Khans of Aynak villages, the Governor did come to the Bolan area and talked with some very wealthy landowner Khans. It has been mentioned that the Khans of the area support the project, at present, and that this is his source. The assumption being that if the Khans accept, the others will cooperate but this does not necessarily follow. If the usual middle-eastern-Islamic patterns of power structure apply in the area, those households directly under a Khan's patronage (in terms of loans, farm labor, tenants, kinsmen) will generally support his position. Independent farmers will have their own ideas of direction but they, too, are not likely to be verbally contradictory of a local Khan. There should be or should have been a study of the power structure of the area to be certain of the various interrelationships of power and independence. The final control of irrigation water to the land in the area is another variable in this power system which must be clearly understood and would affect the relative definition of my term "independent farmer" vis-a-vis the Khan. There may also be a gap between the sort of support a Khan may receive from those who in some way are dependent on him and what may occur when a farmer sees his vineyard about to be leveled.

The discussion so far assumes that the Khans support the project. I found no indication of this, not from the 4 or 5 that we interviewed nor as reflected in the statements of some of the tenants, who themselves were indifferent. One of the problems to be faced by the group of Khans is apparently that they have been

working not only land which officially belongs to them but have also edged over into government land. They figure that with the resurveying will come a loss of at least part of the land area they are now working and possibly a liability of back-taxing on the government land they have been working. Again limited information of a rather vague nature indicates a need for more probing of these questions.

As noted, the tenants stated their indifference about the outcome of the project, because, as they say, they have no land. Their responses, however, may reflect reality, a response to fear of displacement, or ignorance of the fact that blocks of land will be out of cultivation for possibly a season. Plan arrangements must cover support for those owners whose land will be out of cultivation but also those households who work the land either as laborers or tenants if the project is not to have some major negative effects. Data may be available on the various development blocks down the Shamalan as to the varying proportions of laborer, tenant, Khan and small landowners but I have not come across them. This indicates another need for basic study of the area if we are to have any clue as to the relative nature of the affected populations, the ability to predict problems, or any basis on which to understand and solve the problems when they occur.

The small landowner is likely to be one of the worst hit of the economic groups to be affected by the project. There is an example of one man we interviewed who stated that he had about 12 jiribs of land and 13 persons in his household (extended family). He cropped wheat, melons and alfalfa on his land; no double cropping. He had a pair of oxen to work the land plus a cow or two. He said that he could not afford to lose a planting season. The field of alfalfa was of major importance in maintaining his animals. He said he could get 8-9 cuttings per year. If and when this goes out of production, this man is faced with problems. Again, this level of farmer is very concerned about the project, sees it in a negative way, and is very likely to resist the cut in his production.

The nature of the settlement patterns up the Shamalan varies and will likely relate to the degree of hostility to be dealt with if land leveling involves moving villages. For example, one common pattern found was that of villages consisting of a Khan household plus the households of his laborers and tenants, in one case a village of 35 households. Some of these villages are highly mobile; that is, the entire village moved between every 2 to 9 years. These are not villages of nomads but of Khans and tenant farmers. The justification for the move was that the settlement was on the Khan's most infertile block of land and that the pollution of the settlement by animals and people built up the fertility. The movement of the more mobile villages within this pattern would cause little disruption of the way of life. Some, however, are relatively stable, if not completely immobile. The construction

techniques are also different, of a much more permanent nature. Detailed knowledge of the nature of the villages in each development block will do much to predict possible problems.

Related to this mobile village pattern is the fact that landholdings are fragmented, even those of the Khans. In some cases the villages may move relatively long distances, depending where the Khan's blocks of land are located. While this may facilitate the displacement of some of the villages in an area being leveled, it also adds a complicating element to land consolidation. What is the plan for the consolidating of the various parts of land owned by one man which may be scattered up and down the valley and located in areas to be developed at different times? In my questioning, I have not found anyone with the answers; certainly none of the villagers, important or not, have the answers.

It goes without saying the responses to land leveling when the villagers mentioned their vineyards, orchards and trees that line the fields. In village economics, to begin again with these items means several years' wait before the trees and vines become productive, a long-term loss not only of income but of a consumption item. Shade, too, is a valuable item not measurable in cash terms but, as two Khans pointed out as we sat at the edge of a clover field in the shade of a line of trees, it takes 5-7 years to grow such a tree.

My level of ignorance of the details of the project is fairly obvious. It is a product of discussions with a limited number of government people (both U.S. and Afghan), none of whom are directly related to the scheme, and to villagers who know even less. Considering how long the project has been on the drawing boards, this does not indicate the most functional of situations. The project is to be applied. My position and proposal in general terms is that we should have as much detailed information about the socio-cultural-economic context of the area as we have about soils, subsoils and topography. Quick but detailed surveys of the people should be done in each development block long before the mechanical work begins. My first reaction is to ask the question as to how such a project could possibly have been planned without detailed data on the nature of the involved population? Realizing that there are extension agents and others that through long contact with these different sections have important contacts and sources of information on villagers' responses and some idea of the socio-cultural system involved, I suggest that this is not sufficient to deal with the sorts of problems that will no doubt occur. The first should be an unbiased survey of attitudes toward the project and measure of the villagers' understanding of it. The meaning of a petition is quite different from survey results, especially in an area with a power structure based on patronage. This is not to assume that attitudes will change the plan since this is apparently decided but it would give us an indication of potential problems and from what quarter they are likely to come.

Information is needed on proportions of landowners vs. tenants and laborers by development block and their different relations with local big and little Khans, Maliks and Mirobs. The assumption being that to work effectively with and within a social system we must first know what the system is, and this will vary somewhat as we move down the valley.

At the same time, a major effort at informing the villagers as to the nature of the project in detail should be started. There must be time for responses to this information to occur and time for the project to consider and to adjust to these various responses. In short, the public relations activities should function as a source of information for the villagers and as an information gathering unit. Since it is unlikely we will be able to predict all the problems, there must be a degree of built-in flexibility.

Without going into any of the details of the pilot water management plan in Nad-i-All, with most of which I am unfamiliar, I would propose a similar sort of approach to that project. That is, a rather detailed study, given a limited amount of time, of the socio-cultural context within which the project must function.

To repeat, for most of these sorts of programs to deal with the kinds of problems they are faced with, a fairly complete knowledge of the social context must be maintained. This is not to say such knowledge will eliminate the problems but will facilitate understanding of them when they occur and should be the basis upon which action is taken.