

Mr. Albert R. Baron, Assistant Director, HAVR

March 9, 1972

R. B. Scott, AD/DP, USAID/Kabul

Attitudes in the North Shamalan

During the first two weeks in February several visits were made to that part of the North Shamalan previously studied, and to the near village of Basharan, in an attempt to judge the present state of farmers' attitudes toward the Shamalan Project, and to note any potential trouble spots. We were not successful in contacting the Basharan Malik-Mirab during this time partly due to mourning activities related to the death of his brother.

From our discussions, it appears that almost everyone is aware of what the aims of the Shamalan Project are and almost everyone had personal contact with "Aman Khan," Head of HACU, and Sham, his second in command. Some farmers had been to HACU Headquarters in Chah-i-Anjirs for early explanations while others had been in discussions with the Governor on one of his visits in the fall. Thus, contact has been made and awareness established -- if not on a systematic and continuous basis.

This is not to say that most farmers like the aims of the project or think they are any more useful than they stated last summer. There were complaints, several of which reflected a general distrust of government activities, promises, and motives. They still do not see how the new canal will hold any advantages for them. They only see the work as reducing the size of their landholdings via the new canals, ditches, and drains. Some others expressed the fear of water logging and salting resulting from having the canal up-slope, and cited the need for a drainage system in the Babaji area, having waited 15 to 20 years for a solution. In the end, they say they were told the King order the project and so it will be done.

We were questioned about government payment for lands and crops affected by the construction work. We followed the lead by questioning further. Some of the farmers understood that land would be paid for when a response to a letter sent to Kabul was received authorizing payment. Some understood that both land and crops would be paid for. Most farmers registered doubts that any payment, in fact, would be made. All were aware that Muhammadin, owner of the corner plot where the by-pass was dug, received 25,000 Afs. for the corn crop which he lost last fall when construction began. In all, we talked to five owners of land located on the canal, as well as numerous other villagers less directly affected by the immediate construction. No one, other than Muhammadin, had received payment for crops lost in the construction activity, although it was not perfectly clear as to who had actually lost part of last year's second crop.

All farmers contacted had lost part, or all, of their first crop of wheat planted this year. In some cases the border fields were not planted -- apparently at the suggestion of construction personnel. Until the land is actually paid for the villagers must be compensated for each crop lost, and preferably at the time of loss. These farmers have little enough confidence in government activities as it is so perhaps quick and timely payments for losses might do something to change the image.

There was some indication that the owners of Plot 124 (the Said family mentioned in the earlier report) had received compensation for their fruit trees which were lost to the canal. While the son who works for HACU in Chah-i-Anjirs and who is actually in control of the plot was not contacted, we did talk to his aged father who lives at the site. He said he was uncertain about the state of compensation.

In any case, the point to be made is that quick and just payments for all losses stemming from the project must be made. The early and apparently very adequate compensation paid Muhammadin for his corn, helped to get the project into the field. Knowledge of this payment is generally known to everyone which, as long as the precedent is maintained, can be a great advantage in public relation activities.

Besides the apparent lag in payments to those villagers being affected by the project, the only other point to be stressed is that of the need for a more systematic approach to the public relations activity. Apparently, HACU members have done a considerable amount of work in this area, and the villagers no doubt have appreciated the information. However, these same men have major responsibilities in keeping the construction activity moving, which can be described as impressive. Therefore, someone needs to be assigned the specific task of public information -- to listen to farmers' complaints, and to continually assure them of the intent of the project. This should not be a short-term activity concentrated at the point of present construction, but a long-term activity with everyone affected and to be affected. The passage of the canal is only the beginning.

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