

Mr. David Levintow, Assistant Director, HAVR

October 16, 1972

R. B. Scott, Program Office

A discussion with Mohammad Ibrahim Khan of Khalaj

1. It would seem useful to periodically briefly outline the details of what I consider key conversations with farmers, as they relate to a more detailed understanding of the background and problems faced by the Shamalan Land Development Project. This, I think, is one of those key conversations. Unfortunately it was relatively brief.
2. Mohammad Ibrahim is a relatively young man, perhaps in his early 30's, a farmer member of the AFA Board, a tractor and land owner, and a resident of Khalaj. His village complex being located within half a mile of the Barakzai Woliswali in Khalaj. He was a recent participant who went to Turkey. Apparently he speaks clearly and to the point. I have no detailed information on his socio-economic status but would estimate he is a man of some wealth and influence.
3. To begin, he agreed with my observation that the lands east of the Khalaj market, toward the river, were mostly double cropped while lands to the west, toward the desert, completely lack double cropping. This was due to the lack of water in the western section, one of the original justifications for the new Shamalan lateral. He said that the corn crop took more water than the wheat crop, and that landowners down the ditch would not allow sufficient water to pass. He stated that to object to this situation would mean a fight. He noted the differences in the amounts of water in different ditches as a reflection of the water distribution system.
4. The last point discussed related to the agreement between the government and the Khalaj landowners on land development in the Shamalan in the early stages of the planning. He said they had agreed to the canal, hopefully with numerous turn-outs which would eliminate the mis-use of water distribution as it now exists. They had not agreed to the land leveling. There is little doubt that this man has been involved in the discussions with those who have recently set to solidify the opposition to the land leveling aspects of the project. Apparently they have done a relatively thorough job in contacting the key farmers.

5. Probably the main conclusion to draw from this conversation is that there is mis-use of irrigation water in the hands of local systems of power. Larger landowners in these areas have a great deal of power with a number of supporters probably coming from the sub-tribal groups or lineages that tend to be very localized in land holdings, as well as from their sharecroppers and others in positions of socio-economic dependence. The mirab or local water master is part of the local social structure and cannot function independent of it. The mirab is chosen by the landowners of the area serviced. The choice of mirab and the equity of water distribution likely reflect the power relationships between landowners in a particular area. While training programs for mirabs may be somewhat useful in these areas, and water users associations organized, this will not likely make great changes in water distribution in areas of dominant landowners. The actual control of water distribution would need to be shifted out of local hands, and even then the influence of local landowners could still be realized in water distribution. We can expect to find great differences in the problems faced between the settlement areas of Marja and Nad-i-Ali, and those of the long inhabited area along the Helmand flood-plain like Shamalan, Darweshan, etc.