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Another Visit to the North Shamalan

On May 11 and 13 other visits and inquiries were made in the North Shamalan area; first, in conjunction with further studies on Shamalan mills (this report to appear soon); second as a follow-up on the Governor's statements that everyone owed for crop damage, etc, had been paid; and third, to get a clearer understanding of the irrigation problems Muhammadin (owner of the first plot at the north end of the project) attempted to explain during the brief stop we made on wheat day. In the course of resurveying the Bolan mills, inquiries about payments for crop damage were made. As it turned out, one mill owner also owns land on the new lateral.

Crop Damage Payment: From my inquiries of local informants (who generally know who gets paid and how much) I was able to identify three persons who have been paid for crop or tree damage. One was paid last fall for his cerea crop, and two others at approximately 823 on project maps were paid for trees. This third individual, not reported in my last memo on this topic, had apparently been paid at about that time. A mill owner in Bolan stated that he had lost some mulberry trees to the canal works, as had some of his neighbors but that no one had received any payment. Further, if one drives up the canal, nearly every field has apparently sustained some damage. Others along the right-of-way, those who followed the project suggestion and did not plant, sustained even greater losses. While the Governor, during the review sessions, indicated that those who did not plant would not be reimbursed, this is hardly a policy position that can be supported by USAID. These farmers' losses through not planting are a direct result of the project. While they did not lose their seed, they are losing a crop.

While the review sessions were not the place to hammer out the details of such policy matters as suggested in the above discussion, these matters must be discussed, agreed upon and put into action as part of the project, preferably by the top level administrators of HAVA and HAVR. Such matters should probably be put in writing, and someone in HAVR should be assigned the task of monitoring the policy decisions.

Muhammadin's Problems: While we hear that the farmers in the project area affected so far are happy and satisfied with the results, a quick visit to the area indicated that irrigation problems are already being encountered by the locals

and timely action appears necessary. Muhammadin, the Nurzai who owns the first plot of land at the north end of the Shamalan, was the first to agree to cooperate with the project allowing the by-pass to cut across his land. He was rewarded handsomely for his lost corn crop last fall. Since the Basharan ditch that waters the first several kilometers of the north Shamalan, almost down to Bolan Castle, and the new lateral construction virtually wiped out this ditch, a substitute was constructed at the time running along side the new lateral. The shift from the old ditch to the new substitute occurred with minimum delay and apparently limited anguish.

Muhammadin is the first farmer to get his water from this ditch. His gate (the position shown roughly on the attached sketch map Gate #1) is causing him some problems, and presently opens into a melon field, land that was leveled for him by the construction unit at the time of re-filling the by-pass. While the problems he faces are outlined below, in reference to his wheat crop this year (all of which he said was Mexipak) he was quite enthusiastic -- it will be a maximum level harvest.

In short, his problems were: (1) The gate is apparently below the level of part of his melon field causing problems of getting water over the entire area. He wanted to move the gate opening. (2) The government water master who controls the gate from the main structure does not open the gate wide enough. His statement was that the water was enough for wheat and corn but not for cotton and melon. I did not follow the technical implications of what he was saying. (3) The area on the map marked "Corn and Cotton" is a closed area surrounded on two sides by the canal works and on the third side by the desert escarpment. There is no place to drain surplus water off the land. When Gate #2 is opened (it furnishes water only for this plot, which also was leveled by the construction unit) excessive water is allowed in. When I saw it soon after irrigation, perhaps a foot of water was standing at the south end of the field. As I understand the details from Mr. Long, this plot will require careful control with exacting amounts of water allowed to be used if the plot is not to become a reclamation project. The traditional flooding methods now being used will not work since there is no system of artificial drainage.

No doubt there are some errors in my understanding of the technical details of what is happening and these statements are not to imply that Muhammadin is correct in his analysis of the situation. What is clear, however, is that there is immediate need for the water control and use supervision and training which is scheduled as part of the project at some future point in time. The project is changing and has changed the traditional ditch use. Now is the time to begin to work with the farmers and the Mirab in the use of the present water system. Without such immediate input, damage to some of the land is likely to occur before the project has developed. To repeat an earlier statement, the focus of the project must not be only on the point of most advanced construction but well in advance of this point and in the areas already passed by the construction works. According to Mr. Long there was in the recent

past an indigenous work party (probably under the direction of either Muhammadin or the Mirab) that dug the upper reaches of the Basharan ditch deeper which possibly complicated the irrigation of the land, since such alterations would not likely fit the system as designed. No one involved in the official aspects of the project, apparently, is working with these men.

There are discussions on the need for establishing indigenous water committees to deal with problems of water distribution and use. We not infrequently hear that there is no basis for such organizations. I was shown a petition of landowners at the north end of the Shamalan which was to be presented to the Governor requesting that he rectify the water shortage, as they define it, along the Basharan ditch (No. 2 above). It does not appear that these men would be difficult to organize, assuming they could see the real value of such organization.

As a side note, Muhammadin is in the process of building a house/compound on his land where he plans to move his large extended household of around 45 persons. Presently he lives in the village of Basharan. The reason for the decision to move is unclear, whether it is related to the project or not. The stated reason was so that he would be closer to his fields.

Recommendations:

1. Top administrative level meetings between HAVA and HAVR should^{be} held to spell out, in writing, policy matters regarding payment for farmers for damage to crops and trees. These should be reviewed by the Program Office, among others.
2. A careful joint review in the field should be made by a previously uninvolved group of HAVA and HAVR personnel on damages sustained by farmers. This review should begin with an examination of the records of the list of farmers who have to date received compensation. I would be interested in such a list to be used as a basic interview list on events and attitudes in the north Shamalan, the satisfied customer.
3. Technical irrigation people should be in the field now working toward farmer water management organizations, and training on the theories and methods behind the design of the new irrigation systems (present and future). Water use techniques could probably stress that the proper use of water may be more important to a good crop than quantity. This would certainly hold true for Muhammadin's "Corn and Cotton" plot which may presently be endangered. A ruined plot of land (the first plot at the most northern tip of the project area) before the project can move to the demonstration stage will give little confidence to farmers who must be convinced of the true usefulness of the project aims.

SKETCH MAP - NORTH SAHARA

