

Official Memorandum (Draft)

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TO: Mr. D. Levintow and Mr. J. Shankland, HAVR/Lashkar Gah

From: R. B. Scott, Program Office

Subj. Observations in the Shamalan, November-December 1972

Three items will be outlined in this memo: Events about to occur in the Said village of Aynak; the problems of land use at the north end of the Shamalan as a result of the project; and hints of the level of fear of the known and unknown generated by the project among farmers at the north end which has led to the sale of some land.

1. The Said village of Aynak:

In a memo dated April 4, 1972 (sub-titled "The crisis syndrome", I outlined the problems faced by the Said village of Aynak relative to the Shamalan Project and stated the need for official close contact and communication with at least the village leaders. Within the next 10 days, unless the construction activities are diverted, the first machinery will be entering the village making a temporary diversion for the Aynak ditch. The new Shamalan lateral is to pass through the middle of this village dividing that part which sits on the desert escarpment from that built on the edges of the fields.

As noted, the inhabitants of this village are Saids, descendants of the Prophet Mohammad, highly respected locally and likely influential in a limited way. They live as well as some of the wealthier Khans in the valley although they own considerably less land. (See April 18, 1972 report on the cadastral records of this village.) At least 3 are going to make the pilgrimage to Mecca (The

Hajj) this year. They receive some economic support from their religious followings both in the valley and in re-settled Pashtun villages in the northern provinces.

As I understand it, early survey crews were not allowed by these villagers to stake out the tentative canal line through this village more than a year ago. Discussions that followed resulted in some vague notions on the villagers' part that the canal might by-pass the village via the desert, hopes still being voiced on my recent visits to the village November 28-29, 1972. Farmers now plowing and planting fields edging the desert escarpment questioned me concerning how much of their fields would be lost, they would limit the area planted.

The Land Committee of the Shamalan Project, the villagers said, had visited the village and assured those present that the buildings to be destroyed were of little value. One village leader (the adult son of Said Riza, the leading religious figure in the community) went to Lash on about Nov. 27, 1972 to see the governor concerning the construction activities now within a half mile of the village. According to the villager, he was allowed to talk to Mr. Assifi who assured him that the governor would visit the village before the machinery arrived (shortly), and that all damages would be paid. The record of payment for damages to date does little to instill confidence

This week has seen 2-3 brief stoppages of construction activity along the right-of-way because of villager opposition. They are the result of inadequate contact and explanation of project plans to those to be affected. The survey line through the Said village, as I understand it, has yet to be run. Certainly none of the technical people of any of the involved agencies have given the villagers any explanations. The "crisis" tactic used successfully in the past is in the process of being used again. When the canal reaches the village borders there may be some delay but by that time everyone will

realize it is only a delaying action. While this tactic works, it does nothing to gain the goodwill of the farmers who, in theory, are expected to cooperate with the various phases of the project. And we (USAID) apparently continue to maintain, if only passively, that public relations is strictly a HAVA/HACU responsibility. HAVA has yet to adequately support this activity, all of which is in the hands of one individual, Mr. Niamaty. He states that the Land Committee, which must make final decisions on ownership as it relates to damage payments, is generally accomplishing nothing thus hampering the actions that he should be taking.

2. Muhammadin's Problems:

In a memo dated May 29, 1972 in a section also titled "Muhammadin's Problems", I spelled out with sketch map the land use problems faced by this farmer who was the first, and probably only, to cooperate with the project allowing the by-pass for the Shamalan diversion structure to be cut through his fields. So far he has had one crop failure of cotton on the very first piece of land touched by the Shamalan construction, a triangular plot of about one jerib. This was probably due to a combination of poor soil (bypass fill which hardens like stone when dry), high water table (it is surrounded by two canals and the desert escarpment, i.e. no drainage, when the Shamalan lateral comes into use), and over-irrigation (after each irrigation perhaps a foot of water stood for several days at the lower end of the field where there is lack of drainage). Across the new lateral, in his major holding, a plot of cotton suffered from a possible combination of poor soils of the fill and too much water. The main point to be made here is that apparently no one is working with this or any other farmer in dealing with the new system being constructed. The cuts and fills are beautiful examples of engineering skills but to make successful use of the system the farmers need aid and direction from the start, which they are not getting.

Perhaps Muhammadin's triangular jerib of land should never have been put into cultivation. Some of it certainly was not farmed before the project came. But in the construction process the plot was cut, filled and "eye-ball" leveled. He has planted one crop that failed. He is about to plant another. He will likely continue to plant. He is not asking for aid nor demanding anything. I have suggested to him that the project may help improve his situation. In any case, such a plot of land at the beginning of the project does not instill farmer confidence in the advantages of leveling, whether this is a realistic comparison or not. The project made the plot, which may have been a mistake, but Muhammadin is not likely to give it up. To officially buy it and re-fill it with possibly gravel would be one possible solution to eliminate an embarrassment but payment for land and damages has its own set of problems. The only other real alternative is to work with him in an attempt to make the plot productive, even if it means some new fill. Certainly it means close supervision in water control.

3. Land Sold:

In recent discussions with a USAID Afghan employee in Lashkar Gah who owns land in the first 200 acres of the North Shamalan I learned that since my survey of July 1971 he has been able to purchase 3 new plots of this prime land. He already owned two plots. He noted that if it had not been for the anxieties associated with the land leveling aspect of the project, the farmers would never have sold. At least one of these plots was bought as the corn crop was being harvested this fall at the time attempts were being made to start the leveling. While this is only one example or event, it does give a clue as to the level of anxiety associated with the details of the project. Certainly these farmers were not convinced of the harmlessness and advantages of the project. I suggest that it is another reflection of the lack of confidence in the project and lack of accurate, believable information being spread about its goals, i.e. a public information activity.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations:

The public information and public relations activities are nearly non-existent and the methods that are being used perhaps do more harm than good. This situation is not in the best interests of USAID or conducive to the successful implementation of future aspects of the project. This includes non-payment for crop damage and the right-of-way. I recommend that BuRec halt all construction activity after the competition of reach 4 until these payments are made along the construction route generated to date, and until HAVA fields an adequate public relations activity. Further the Governor should make some necessary adjustments in the Land Committee which would indicate his displeasure with their inaction on payment for damages. USAID, with a clear conscience, could not advocate further implementation of phases of the project (phases that require farmer cooperation) in the light of what is happening.

Assuming a more realistic approach can be instituted to deal with the people, I recommend that the agriculture sections of HAVA and HAVR become actively involved in making this, to date, engineering project into an improved farming project, the original goal. This would include extension advice on reclaiming edges of fields cut by the construction and water management where the water source has been altered. But under present conditions I would not recommend that the agriculture sections become involved.

I recommend immediate official contact with Muhammadin and action to solve his problem with his one jerib field, including if necessary fill. Another crop failure is another strike against us.

I recommend immediate combined action by USAID, BuRec, HAVA and HACU to see that the Said village is fully informed of

what is planned for their village in detail before the machinery enters their fields, reach 5. Special consideration should be given to connecting the future two parts of the village by a bridge, probably motorable, which the canal is about to divide. The only planned crossing is nearly a quarter of a mile away at the Nad-i-Ali wasteway crossing. This village includes closely related families who no doubt have patterns of visiting and cooperation that are about to be disrupted if they are not considered carefully. Women and small children are also involved. At the beginning of reach 5 (just behind the tomb) there is a ford and road that connects the desert road with the drain system and is frequently used. A motorable bridge at the village (the location to be worked out in agreement with the villagers) would allow this road to remain an important line of communication. There are certainly few of these in the Shamalan.