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The beginning of the crunch: A statement and analysis of present village attitudes in the North Shamalan

General: The information presented in this memo was collected over the past 6-8 weeks during numerous visits to the North Shamalan and, as a summary event, at the general meeting between the Land Committee of HAVA and about 12 farmer-owners of the first 150-200 acres on 17 September, 1972. There is further secondhand information on a second meeting between the farmers and the Land Committee on 27 September, mostly from village informants who attended. It should be noted that some of the points being raised by the farmers now are basically the same as those the same men raised a year or more ago. My contact with these men has been on a relatively long-term basis, the initial contact being made, with most, a year ago July in the survey situation which lead to the report, The North Shamalan: A Survey of Land and People. These farmers have consistently been very direct in their questions and answers about the Shamalan Land Development project, and the events and statements made at the Sunday, 17 September, meeting were nothing new but a public and group expression of ideas previously explained to me individually.

Initial contacts: More than a year ago USAID/Kabul was informed that the Governor had made contact with an unspecified number of Khans about the project, and that they supported him. The farmers to be affected by the project now indicate these initial contacts were with four Khans (others say two) who were not from the north end, and the names were given. It is not certain that this information is accurate. They suggested that it would have been useful to have canvassed all the farmers, especially those to be first affected, rather than the way it was done. None of these landowners of the North Shamalan, including one relatively powerful Khan, were contacted about their views. According to Mr. Sultan Omar of our HAVR office, there were numerous meetings between the Governor and his staff and a relatively large number of influential Khans of the Shamalan. In any case, in the recent meetings the landowners have stated an interest in further meetings with the Governor to have him name the men who agreed with him on the project. One Khan of Khalaj, a recent AID participant to Turkey, told me that he had been in the original discussions on the project, that the group had agreed to the building of the new canal but not to land leveling.

The basic stand: To the man, I found no one who wanted the project as it involves land leveling. There are numerous reasons for this position; the most basic being the lack of understanding of the usefulness of the leveling for them as farmers. There has been

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no systematic attempt to explain to the farmers the technical advantages of the proposed system, nor have individual farmers been told how the scheme would affect their holdings. In the 17 September meeting and before, these farmers compared their lands and crops with Bolan government farm and other "developed" areas of the Helmand, and found their own production best. The Bolan government farm comparison should probably be considered unfair since it is an experiment station, and is generally not seriously farmed by the government officials in charge. Generally, the 1970 Farm Economic Survey supports the farmers' views; the Shamalan is one of the most productive areas in the Helmand Valley. They further suggested that the money and development activity be diverted to the Seraj area, the downhill or eastern side of the Shamalan canal, or even the Khalaj area, areas they define as in need of development. But not their own land.

With the leveling activity they expect to sustain considerable crop loss and damage due to the timing of the work as it relates to planting season. They expect to realize a loss of production (fertility) from the shifting of top soil in the process of leveling. They still believe that houses, vineyards and orchards will probably be leveled although this is no longer part of the plan except where it is absolutely necessary. They do not believe they will be paid for their losses, and point out that nothing in the present delays in payment for canal right-of-way land indicates that they may be mistaken. In the rather heated Sunday, 17 September, meeting one farmer stated, after having it explained to him that the law spells out the right to payment, that while the law will compensate him for his losses, the individual responsible for payment would not. This is a rather neutral paraphrase of the original statement. A second farmer suggested that the Government would generate farmer debts to the project in amounts equal to proposed compensation, i.e., no compensation would be paid. There was one apparent accusation of the need for bribery to receive compensation. In short, these landowners believe they will sustain the loss resulting from the project with no real advantage to come of it. There is a general lack of confidence in government motivations and officials. Specifically, they feel they will be required to bribe members of the Land Committee to get what they see as rightfully theirs from the start. In a private conversation, one landowner suggested that the Government keep all its money, the farmers were not asking for it, and the farmers could keep their land in its present condition.

There are numerous doubts about whether their land will actually be returned to them after leveling. This stems from past events in other areas of the Helmand (e.g., land development near Darweshan) and also from recent discussions of the loss of various amounts of unregistered, untaxed land presently being used, as defined in the decree. Apparently in some cases, farmers have gradually edged over into plots of land belonging to the Government. In other cases, there are differences

between amounts of land recorded by the cadastral survey and the amounts upon which taxes are being paid. They will lose the use of all or part of such lands. Basically there is no trust of government officials' statements or motivations which is apparently supported by past experience. One individual suggested, not in the meeting, that guarantees of return should be issued on land to be leveled, before leveling, and that there should be foreign involvement in the process of payment for damages. He further suggested that past debts for right-of-way should be paid before further work is allowed. I agreed with him.

The question of traditional orientations blocking the process of land consolidation which was expected has never come up as an issue. No one in the project is yet in a position to discuss with the farmers the exact details of how each will be affected. The design activities have been hamstrung by delays in getting basic data from the HAVA Engineering Section, who were to do the necessary field survey work, and apparently by a rather uncooperative Cadastral Survey Office that was to furnish accurate landholding records. Statements of explanation of the project remain at a rather generalized level and it is not certain that what has been said about consolidation has established any real understanding among the farmers.

Government power: The basic stand as outlined above is that they do not want land leveling. On top of this, however, come statements that they know if the Government wants to force the issue, they, the farmers, are powerless. In the 17 September meeting, as before, they were told that whether they agree or not, the land leveling would begin. As a further example, the farmers pointed out that while they are supposed to be paid for losses, except for three men, nothing has been paid and they, the farmers, are helpless to do anything about it. The law, the Shamalan Decree, the National Assembly and King were all noted in the meeting as the base support upon which the project is to be completed.

Of the three men who have received payment, one was paid more than the value of his corn crop last September 1971, as an incentive to cooperate with the project when construction began (discussed on page 4). One man, an employee of HACU, was paid for some trees when the new canal was cut through his orchard. The third man also received payment for a few destroyed trees, mulberry, on the right-of-way but the details are unknown. There has been other damage to vineyards and orchards unpaid. As of November 10, 1972 no one has received payment for land taken by the canal-right-of-way although there have been continuous promises made to the farmers. Not only have the farmers not been paid for their land, they have not been paid for the loss of crops from this land in some cases for more than a year. None of this adds to the already questionable credibility of HAVA vis-a-vis the farmers.