

# **END OF ASSIGNMENT REPORT**

## **Alternative Income Project**

**19 November 2004 to 31 January 2005**

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### **INTRODUCTION:**

This report outlines the activities and strategies used to start up the Alternative Income Project (AIP) in central Helmand Valley, Afghanistan. It offers recommendations for additional activities and changes of present approaches to increase project impact. It makes suggestions for additional actions for coming parallel project start-up actions that could have been taken at this project's start up phase and would have increased overall impact. The information in this report comes from experience with this project, two previous projects with approximately the same goals and methods, plus involvement in central Helmand studies and projects since 1971. Most if not all of what appears in this report was discussed and argued (dialogue) with AIP project management at some point during the assignment.

The tone of this report will be that of an evaluation with recommendations. "End of Assignment" reports have little value if we do not learn from our present and past experiences, and take the necessary actions to address problems. Few people are present in a region or project site long enough to see the results of errors. I have been.

In short, the start-up phase of AIP succeeded in getting a large number of men to work in central Helmand (2,200 in Nad-i-Ali; 3,000 in Marja) during the period of my short assignment. This is providing a great increase in alternative incomes for this segment of rural society. And in conjunction with the local government's anti-opium poppy campaign, the results will be a dramatic reduction of poppy cultivation in this region during this crop season. This conclusion also is based on field observations of areas that I have been monitoring since 1997 and discussions with a variety of tribal leaders, influentials, local government officials and police.

The continuing need for careful monitoring and good field supervision and management cannot be over emphasized. To put large numbers of men in the field working is easy. To have them supervised at a level to be an effective work force is difficult. And I do not have the impression that this point is fully appreciated by project management.

### **THE PROJECT:**

The Alternative Incomes Project (AIP) should accomplish three main goals:

1. Provide an alternative income source for some of the sizable regional work force in Helmand province. Using labor intensive methods, they can replace the lost incomes normally earned through the labor intensive opium poppy cultivation.
2. Rehabilitate and improve much of the central Helmand irrigation system and the infrastructure that supports it.

3. Reduce drastically the cultivation of opium poppy especially in the central Helmand region during this crop year, in conjunction with the Afghan government's eradication program in the region.

In words and actions, the AIP should give continuous support and focus to all three elements. As the project title suggests, alternative income is the initial project action but it is a narcotics program tactic and must not become the sole focus. In the hectic process of fielding and managing 5-10,000 men, it is easy to lose site of the broader picture.

The central Helmand is a very productive cash crop, double-cropping region that depends heavily on a very large work force of sharecroppers, day laborers and traditional migratory laborers from other regions of the province and beyond. It is also a region with one of the largest concentrations of tractors in the country. The work force has been involved with the very labor intensive cultivation of opium poppy beginning sometime during the Soviet occupation with a high production year in 1999. It is also involved with the cultivation and harvest of the more traditional crops of wheat, cotton, peanuts, corn, mung bean, melons and vegetables, to list the most common. But opium poppy is a more lucrative crop for both the farmers and the work force. AIP is intended to provide, at least partially, an alternative supplementary income for some of this work force. There is a tendency to state project accomplishments in terms of a body count, number of men working, because that is apparently the terms of the contract. But the project is and must be much more than a kind of modern day WPA activity. AIP must accomplish as much top quality work as possible during the limited life of the project. This means a focus on supervision/management as well as the numbers of workers employed. Some of our management policies have tended to work against this target.

The primary goal of AIP is to help eliminate the cultivation of opium poppy. This action is being accomplished by the Afghan government's strong anti-poppy campaign through radio, face-to-face dialogue with the farmers and eradication field teams that plow up poppy fields of those farmers who do not listen. But the eradication effort is not simply the enforcement of the law. In fact, there is little "law" to enforce in at least rural Afghanistan. The governor and his staff are in a constant mode of negotiations with the farmers about ceasing poppy cultivation. AIP is one of the elements in these negotiations, and thus becomes a "carrot" as it were. AIP must be considered a first step in helping to eliminate opium poppy cultivation in central Helmand, not a final solution. This year will likely be as successful in poppy reduction in central Helmand as 2003 when it was reduced by 85% in Nad-i-Ali alone. Hopefully, unlike 2004, AIP will be followed up by an effective program next year.

AIP personnel must be involved in the anti-poppy campaign dialogue along with the local government officials to insure the farmers clearly understand the relationship between the work and the goals. It is easy for project personnel to focus on the technical details of the work and ignore the reality of purpose. Early on, apparently, project management and perhaps USAID thought that discussions with the farmers about project goals, the elimination of opium poppy as a cash crop, would scare them away from project participation. Wrong. In central Helmand, these are knowledgeable cash crop farmers with one of the alternative crops being poppy. They have a great interest in discussions on the future of this crop that they clearly understand is on its way out, in Helmand at least. They are interested in the government's position (which is not always clear) as well as that of the rest of the world. They will discuss opium production and prices as openly as they will discuss the price of cotton and the reasons for its decline. AIP personnel must be involved in these discussions. In the past, a common response

from other projects' engineers on this subject was that it was not their problem and they did not discuss the subject with the farmers with whom they worked on a daily basis. Wrong again.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*Insure that AIP personnel are involved in the anti-poppy dialogue with the farmers and laborers that is associated with this project. This should be a topic frequently stressed in AIP staff meetings, and a topic discussed with the farmers on any and all occasions. The discussions should be up-front and clear with a stress being on the fact that if poppies continue to be cultivated, development funds will be cut...which they will be.*

The second and very important goal of AIP is the rehabilitation of the central Helmand irrigation system and the infrastructure that supports it. The obvious results of the intensive hand labor work are as important as the other elements, politically as well as economically. While the labor intensive work benefits primarily the work force, the rehabilitation work benefits the farmers with an improved irrigation system. Again, AIP must not be a modern day WPA but a major, focused rehabilitation project.

There appears to be no concept paper for AIP that spells out the project focus, and present interpretations of project focus are too narrow. The present focus in central Helmand at least, has been on cleaning irrigation drains. For impact, the project scope should be much broader.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*Broaden the range of project work to include work on the canals, roads, bridges and the rest of the support infrastructure, now. It is possible to walk and chew gum at the same time..*

From the start of the project, in all meetings with the Nad-i-Ali and Marja Shuras and groups of local Khans, influentials and tribal leaders on the subject of project goals (cleaning the drains) three other requests for action were continually stated:

- 1) Increase the price paid by the local government cotton gin for cotton.**
- 2) Work on cleaning the Boghra canal, the main canal in the central Helmand irrigation system.**
- 3) Repair the farm and regional roads that are in very poor and rough condition.**

- 1) *Increase the price paid by the local government cotton gin for cotton.*

Cotton has been the traditional primary cash crop in Helmand since the mid-1960s when the gin was built by the British in Lashkar Gah. There was a boom period of cotton production in the mid-1970s when the government increased the price of cotton and the farmers increased production many fold in a period of three years to the point where the gin could not process the cotton in a timely manner. The British build a second cotton gin in Girishk in time for the USSR invasion in 1979. The Girishk gin was leveled by bombing against the Taliban in early 2002.

This crop year, the government increased the price of cotton at the beginning of the harvest season to 17 afs. per kilo. This followed a major dispute over the cotton price the previous harvest season, to which farmers responded with a bumper crop of opium poppy. But mid-season, the government reduced the price of cotton to 14 afs. per kilo and long delayed payments for the cotton delivered to the gin. During this time, I did not learn the reasons for this change. This is not a good policy to follow in the context of the opium poppy reduction program. The markets for cash crop farmers must be good and

reliable. Cotton price is as important an element in this anti-opium program as is alternative incomes. This is a point that is being ignored by the donors.

While there is not much AIP can do about the price of cotton, it would appear that some action would be within the scope of RAMP, the other Chemonics project.

2). *Work on cleaning the Boghra canal, the main canal in the central Helmand irrigation system.* The last major work on the Boghra canal was accomplished in the winter of 1998-99 by MCI using a combination of hand labor (up to 3,000 men per day), three backhoes and one very old dragline. This past fall and presently, Helmand Construction Company (HCC) put 5 draglines to work on limited sections of the Boghra canal in the Marja area with Ministry of Rural Development (MRD) funding (donor unknown).

For these landowners and *Shura* members drainage is important, but increased irrigation water through the system would take precedence in their minds. Cleaning the Boghra canal increases the water flow through the system. As in pre-war years, the farmers complained about not having enough irrigation water. And the further down the system they are located, the louder the complaints. Unlike the pre-war years, more farmers are digging/drilling wells and pumping water out of the drainage system to supplement their primary water source, the Boghra canal.

In the present context, it is not possible to clean all or most of the Boghra canal in one year, in the same way it was not possible to clean all or most of the Boghra canal in one year before the war, not by machine and not by hand. But some work on particularly badly silted sections of the canal can be useful and can be relatively easily accomplished by hand labor (AIP). And supervision of a large work force on the Boghra canal is relatively easy because everyone can be seen at a glance, unlike work on most of the smaller drains.

A lost opportunity? The Boghra canal is shut down for about 40 days each year for maintenance beginning in early January when the wheat is dormant, when cloudy and rainy days are most likely, when irrigation water is least needed. This year could be an extended period of shut down because of the continuing rain and the reduced need for irrigation. In recent years the usefulness of this period has been limited because virtually no one has funded rehab work on the Boghra canal. The *mirabs* (local water masters) have continued to call out household members for maintenance work on their irrigation ditches for which they are traditionally responsible. According to a royal decree dating from the early 70s, the government is responsible for the water and the system of the main canals (the Boghra canal), and the local water users groups with their *mirabs* are responsible for the water, its distribution and the maintenance of the ditches that deliver it. It is possible that the ditches that were under consideration for work in Nad-i-Ali at the time of my departure were part of this local responsibility.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*While already too late, an additional 500-1,000 men could be (have been) added to the present work force of 2,200 men in Nad-i-Ali for a period of 30-40 days in the area of Nakilabad where we already had 1,000 men working. There is a section of the Boghra canal in this area that has silt build up of some 3-4 cubic meters of silt for every linear meter of canal. This silt is in the form of shoulders on mostly the eastern side of the canal, some 6-8 feet wide and 5-6 feet deep, the result of blown dust, not river silt. This silt can be removed at a rate of some 1.5 to 2 cubic meters per day per man, i.e., up to 60,000 cubic meters of silt removed in 30 days for 1,000 men or 30,000 man days (body count). This would widen the canal in this area and*

*reduce drag (increase flow) of the water through the system. Because of the time constraint, this would be a 7-day work week.*

Discussions related to work on the Boghra canal during the shut down period were initiated by me from the start of the project but rejected apparently because of the limited project scope. A second rationalization was that hand labor cannot have an impact on such a large system. In the winter of 1998-99, we (MCI) had a major impact on the Boghra canal flow with up to 3,000 men at work during the shut down period removing 20 years of accumulated silt from selected problem areas (identified by the chief *mirab*). See my MCI Final Report. Some 107,562 cubic meters of silt were removed by hand labor with some 80,000 man days. Any well managed hand labor work on desilting sections of the Boghra canal will have a positive impact on the system. Again, for an effective project, the scope of work must be broadened, now.

Most project engineers will disagree with this position on the effectiveness of hand labor in the Boghra canal. They prefer to use heavy equipment on large scale work like the Boghra canal, and machines are certainly easier to manage than a large work force. But most project engineers have no experience with using a large labor force on large scale work. Central Helmand farmers have first hand experience with the effectiveness of a large labor force in the Boghra canal.

*3) Repair the farm and regional roads that are in very poor and rough condition.*

This request is normally first couched in terms relating to women's health and attempts to get them to the limited medical facilities. But in discussions of vegetable crops, complaints refer to produce damage en route to market. Discussions with owners of local taxis, buses, trucks and mini-buses entail complaints of damage to vehicles and tires. For anyone who travels in the region by vehicle, repair or at least smoothing of the local roads is a priority.

Many of the drains being cleaned have service roads running down at least one side of the drainage ditch. Many of these service roads act as major arteries of transport through the region. More of these service roads are used as tractor access to the fields. After cleaning the drains, we commonly spread the spoils across the road so as not to block the road. But more time could be spent, with the same labor force, to smooth the surface better and improve the drainage. With a small budget to rent local tractors with blades for better angling of road surfaces and to haul gravel from the near-by washes (free gravel except for transportation) hundreds of kilometers of road surface could be improved at the same time as the drain cleaning with little additional expense.

In addition, with some tractor rental budgeting, some of the local tractor owners could be convinced to provide some free tractor time...with the proper approach. This was the experience in 2002 with the HAFO/DAI project.

***RECOMMENDATION:***

*Budget \$10,000 for tractor rental for use in Nad-i-Ali and approve road repair as part of the project focus, now. The cost of tractors is about \$9 per hour. For the major market roads though the region, like that passing in front of the Wolis Wol's office, the HCC grader could be rented for limited use at about \$90 per hour for major rehab, shaping and improvement. This price is negotiable. Support (hand labor) crews would accompany the grader for spreading gravel and removing the larger stones from the wash gravel, something not generally done.*

As a side note, there was an early project management suggestion of importing cobblestone road builders from Bolivia to train Afghans to build cobblestone roads. Even more frightening, there was USAID/Kabul agreement with the idea to cobble the road from Lashkar Gah to the nearby tourist site of Kale Bost. While this suggestion may have some value in the very distant future, it does not address the present and immediate needs of central Helmand to improve farm road conditions in this cash crop area. Although not labor intensive, the same funds would be better spent on the purchase of one or more road graders. There are literally hundreds of miles of earth/gravel farm roads in need of immediate attention after decades of neglect. There are also cobblestone roads in Pakistan, mostly in towns like Peshawar and Quetta but the tendency there is to switch to asphalt. Cobble stone specialists, if needed, might be found nearer than South America.

### **THE WORK:**

The start-up work was to focus on central Helmand in Nad-i-Ali and Marja with further projects in Babaji, Bolan (Nawa), Darwishan, Kajaki and Saraj. The justification for the start-up focus on central Helmand can be found in Appendix 1 to this report.

A recurring theme in this report is the importance of good field supervision and management. This point cannot be restated too often. To assume that a system can be set up that does not require regular and constant monitoring and supervision from various levels is wishful thinking. A project with several thousand men working in several different locations with different levels of management skills supervising requires careful monitoring; assuming quality and timely work is expected. We must not ignore the lesson General Custer taught us on dividing our forces.

Project activity start-ups were delayed 10 days to 2 weeks by meetings and agreements with HAVA and the Shuras (counsels of elders) in Nad-i-Ali and Marja. Rather than meetings of information, the meetings set the stage for these groups to be involved in project management decisions....a mistake. While this may be the democratic way of doing things, it resulted in some policies of poor field management. As in the past, the field activities could have started almost immediately with oral agreements with HAVA, with written agreements to follow. An informative discussion with Engineer Dawari, president of HAVA, on project goals and the need for an immediate start, would have opened the door. He is a reasonable man. I was not involved in the meetings with Engineer Dawari on these issues although I have worked with him on several occasions over the past five years and had established a good working relationship with him.

The *Shura* meetings should have followed start-up activities, held on a continuous basis for information, dialogue and feedback, not direct involvement. These groups and individuals (including the governor on down) are bound by many complex social, political and economic interests, relationships and obligations that make effective field management decisions on their part difficult. Where possible, they should be involved in informational dialogues, allowing their interests to be aired but not involved in the elements of project management decisions. Foreign development groups have a well-earned reputation among Afghans (based on experience) of a lot of talk and little action. An effort must be made to change this image.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

*In the future, focus on short cuts through the normal bureaucratic procedures which can follow. Quick and immediate action and impact should be the focus. Afghanistan and central Helmand has been waiting long enough for the donors to act. There is no time to waste.*

HAVA provided three field management people for Nad-i-Ali, my area of focus, and a similar group for Marja. The Nad-i-Ali men included the chief water master, his deputy and a regular water master from the area. The chief water master of Nad-i-Ali has some 60-70 sub-water masters under his control. All three men are land owners who reside in the area. One of their normal duties is the mobilization of hand labor work forces for the maintenance of that irrigation system outside the main canals. As might be expected, these three men were an outstanding contribution to our work management group, effectively organizing work groups and addressing a variety of political issues that developed in the context of this project. They were paid a per diem for days they worked with AIP.

At the time of my departure, HAVA was in the process of replacing these three key people with other HAVA employees of lesser grades and experience. As with the work-force turn over, the idea was to "spread the wealth" allowing other HAVA personnel to receive sizable (for them) per diem payments for work with AIP. In terms of project management, the original HAVA staff members assigned to AIP should not be replaced.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*Explain to Engineer Dawari the need to keep the present HAVA staff members assigned to AIP. Search for a solution to his political dilemma of keeping his whole staff happy with the cooperative effort with AIP. Perhaps additional HAVA staff could be assigned to other tasks with AIP. There can never be too much field supervision.*

*Within AIP, reconsider the present policies that are aimed at "spreading the wealth" with periodic project personnel turn over. For project effectiveness, there must be a balance between project management and "spreading the wealth".*

AIP assigned me as field coordinator and assigned Nur Ali as chief engineer for Nad-i-Ali. On my departure, AIP assigned a chief engineer/manager for each of the two areas of focus at the south end of the system and in Nakilabad (in the north). At the time of my departure, we had 2,200 men working in Nad-i-Ali, and about 3,000 in Marja.

The work force was recruited in groups of 200 men with one supervisor and 10 foremen. The supervisors were selected by AIP and the foremen by the local communities. The first 7 supervisors were past employees of the HAFO/DAI drainage project with at least one year experience in supervising manual drain cleaning in Nad-i-Ali. One of these supervisors was a previous chief water master for Nad-i-Ali. A process of selection was introduced at the time of my departure allowing supervisors to be selected by a committee including the *Wolis Wol*, the *Shura* head and an AIP representative, a democratic process that produced inexperienced supervisors. Again, effective field supervision of our work force is the key to project success.

Without mobility, a good supervisor will be able to provide only marginal field management for a work force of 200 men in drain cleaning where the men may be spread over a distance of a half a kilometer or in some cases in two different drains a kilometer apart. A work force this size could be and was better supervised in larger-scaled work in the Boghra canal where the group is less dispersed.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*As previously recommended, assign a supervisor for every 100 men. The quality and speed of the work will be increased, according to several of my long term supervisors, including the ex-chief water master.*

Although there is a foreman for every 20 men, the foremen are selected by the community where local pressures likely limit their effectiveness in the process of pushing the men to excel in productivity. And as previously noted, quality of work and speed of completion (productivity) are as important to this project as is body count.

**Start-up Ceremony:**

I recommended that a start-up ceremony be held at the work site at the beginning of AIP. As in the past, the various government offices, including the governor's, would be represented. The local radio station would give coverage to the event and I offered to get VOA/Pashto to give coverage. The purpose of this ceremony would be to give the government publicity for their anti-opium poppy campaign and credit for the AIP support. As noted above, poppy eradication is not a one way street with the government simply applying the "law". For all practical purposes there is no "law" and poppy eradication is a process of negotiations with the farmers by the government. And the government must have some negotiable elements, like AIP, to sweeten the bitter pill of economic loss for the farmers and the large work force of farm labor. An effective and widely publicized project start up ceremony announces to the public and legitimizes the significance of the event. No such ceremony happened.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*In the future, organize a sizable and widely publicized start-up ceremony for projects the purpose of which is to absorb some of the negative repercussions of opium poppy eradication. Local government should take the lead role since they are the front-line agencies for the enforcement. Foreign radio coverage like VOA and BBC would add further legitimacy to the project. In my opinion, it would be a political error to combine AIP start-up ceremony with anything associated with the establishment of the local PRT.*

**Personnel Turn over:**

One of the political problems faced from the beginning of the project has been that of more men wanting to work than we have had positions. This was especially the case when our work force was frozen at 1,000 men because of security concerns (the stolen vehicle at the Babaji work site). Each community wanted its men to do the work on the drains in it's locale. This is a logical concern for the distribution of the alternative incomes through the region but it represents management as well as political problems. In Nad-i-Ali, we had our first complete turn over of work force after roughly two months work. When properly managed, the work force is a hard-working group of men working under difficult conditions: frequently standing in calf-deep water in cold weather. But they do not understand the needs of a drainage system simply because they are irrigation farmers: they need some level of training and experience. This training and experience is lost with every worker turn over. In Nad-i-Ali we did not replace our supervisory staff with each turn over, only the foremen and workers. The experienced supervisors are the primary technical management memory for the project. It is my understanding that the supervisors are replaced with each worker turn over in Marja. Politically this would appeal to the local population but it would be a major set back for effective management of the technical details of the project.



**RECOMMENDATION:**

*Do not replace the experienced supervisors with each work force turn over. And work toward establishing a system where the total work force is not replaced on a periodic basis. The addition of a 200 man unit as the project moves into a new area will in most cases address this problem.*

We might assume that with a set turn-over of a total work group at the end of an assigned block of work would tend to slow work progress but one of the project goals is productivity. As with past similar projects, we have been moving toward establishing a daily work assignment for the work groups. At the end of the daily assignment, the work group could go home. But the drains tend to vary according to the amounts of work required. The supervisor has to be accurate in estimating the work required. And he must be a first rate politician in the process of assigning the work

**Over-excavation:**

One technical problem that emerged with the work was over-excavation of the drains. This became clear in the areas where the drains had been cleaned by the HAFO/DAI drainage project of 2002. At that time, concrete pipe was placed in the drains with earth fill up to ground level, replacing the farmer built tractor crossings into fields and homesteads that commonly restricted the flow of drain water. These pipes were placed after the cleaning was accomplished and were on grade. After the present cleaning, these pipes were commonly 6-12 inches above grade which again restricted the flow and required the pipes to be lowered to the new grade. Where the pickup drains entered the deep drains (the deep drains are not part of the project) this over excavation sometimes allowed deep drain water levels to back up into the pickup drains. This does not stop the flow of drain water but allows some level of backup water to stand in the lower reaches of the pickup drains, never free of water. At first, and in some drains in Marja, the water back up problem appeared to be with the deep drains not having been cleaned. But the levels of the pipes placed in the drains in 2002 indicated that the drains were being over excavated, below grade. This is a point the work force and some of the supervisory staff missed and simply observed that the concrete pipes were off grade and needed lowering to permit good water flow. With work force turn over, this technical fact requires training and good supervision.

Where Drain 1-A meets Deep Drain #1 in south Nad-i-Ali, the water level in Deep Drain # 1 backs up into pickup Drain 1-A. The drain water in Drain 1-A flows but there is standing back up in the first 20-30 m. of the drain. Deep Drain #1 was cleaned with dragline in 2002. The complicating factor at this place is that the bottom of Deep Drain #1 is a thick layer of conglomerate that the dragline could not break through in 2002.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*Have Johannes look at this site and discuss the problem with the local concerned farmers. They believe that if the drain pipe were angled down stream that the problem would be solved. Would it be worth while to have the conglomerate removed allowing Deep Drain#1 to be excavated deeper? Water runs down hill. This was a problem identified in 2002 but not addressed. It would probably require a ripper on the back of an HCC bulldozer, which is available. This work could not be done under AIP with the present guidelines because of the lack of any support machine work, and it can not be done by hand.*

## **COMMUNICATIONS:**

### **Insufficient communications:**

Effective Field management is based on good communications. Unfortunately, our field communications were word-of-mouth only, in a situation where our 2,200 men were spread over two locations: in the south and north ends of Nad-i-Ali, a distance of some 16-20 km. as the crow flies. For the first two and a half months of the project, we had two project vehicles for the area. The three HAVA personnel were using their personal vehicles on a daily basis for project work without compensation. They, like the senior AIP staff members, move from work site to work site monitoring work progress and project needs. To state the obvious, to leave large work groups unmonitored for any period of time is to leave them unsupported: poor field management. Several of the AIP supervisory staff also used their privately owned motorcycles for running project errands and maintaining contact. Without radio communications, vehicle mobility is very important for field projects with large numbers of men located in several different locations. Past similar projects (MCI) provided supervisory staff with project motorcycles. Time is money and word-of-mouth communications is big waste of time in this era of modern communications.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

*Purchase a large number of small, hand-held radios that can function over 10-20 mile distances, one for each supervisor and up, including the HAVA personnel assigned to the AIP. Continuous travel and word-of-mouth communications is the present unsatisfactory system of communications. It is not effective for good management or security. Although the new Land Rovers with radio communication may be operational by now, they will not meet most basic project needs other than security.*

### **Mobility:**

As noted, the present supervisory team is relatively isolated unless they use their own vehicles, which some of them do. The site supervisors and managers travel continuously to maintain contact. At one point it was suggested that each supervisor be provided with a bicycle. Given the condition of most of the drain service roads and the distances to be covered by the supervisors to maintain frequent contact with their foremen and work groups, bicycles are not the answer.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

*Provide each supervisor with a motorcycle for purposes of work, communications and as a perk..*

*Provide the HAVA staff members assigned to the AIP a vehicle/motorcycle for project use, communications and as a perk.. Or at least provide them with compensation for the use of their personal vehicles.*

### **Team-building Lunches:**

It was suggested at the beginning of the project to set up a movable project office/guest room for project staff in what ever area we were working. In most cases, these rooms can be used without charge. The people in Nakilabad, for example offered both a guest room and a lockable storage room near the start up work site without charge. As is fairly normal, the guest room was associated with a local mosque. I suggested that the supervisory staff be provided lunch in the guest room daily. As the work progresses and the work areas shift over time, these guest houses would be moved to the new work areas. The cost of a local cook would be that of an additional day laborer. As there is virtually no occasion when staff meets, the working lunch allows this staff and other visitors to get together on a regular basis to

discuss mutual management problems. The working lunch is a relatively standard perk for supervisory staff in projects and it doubles as the all-important function of project communications. While the cost would be minimal relative to the benefits, the reasons for the opposition to the working lunch were not clear.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*Establish project guest rooms in collaboration with the local communities and serve daily lunches for the supervisory staff.*

**Staff Meetings:**

Much of my information about project progress and problems was gathered in the form of hearsay and from overhearing discussions in the office. As the office grew to several different offices, the occasions even for overhearing discussions diminished. Staff meetings, rare during the first two and a half months, are crucial to keep project staff informed of events.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*Schedule brief and focused, daily staff meetings at the end of the day to ensure project staff are informed directly of project events.*

**PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAM (PRT)**

In terms of security, the presence of the PRT in Helmand and its fortress in Lashkar Gah is reassuring. The relationship between the PRT and AIP is positive and supporting. The primary support being the perhaps over-guarding of the pay day convoys to Marja and Nad-i-Ali with two Hummers with mounted machine guns. The local police appear to be effective guards and accompany each of the paymasters on their rounds to each of the work groups. As the project spreads to the more distant locations of Darwishan and Kajaki, the logistics of PRT security will become more complex.

While the PRT is appreciated by the locals for the security they bring to the area, they remain the occupying foreign military force and offer clear targets for the opposition if confrontation were to emerge in this relatively calm area. And, as the French have pointed out, the blurring of the lines between the military operation and reconstruction activities may not be a healthy development for reconstruction personnel. The concept of the PRT is borrowed from Vietnam, where it did not work. The concepts of a military operation (for which the military is trained) and economic aid/reconstruction were/are too dissimilar

In terms of reconstruction activities, given the events of the first two and half months of the AIP, the PRT would appear to be bogged down with bureaucratic procedures, unable to respond quickly to relatively simple project actions.(PRT source) The PRT has a USAID coordinator assigned. The PRT does not implement the reconstruction activities but contracts with private concerns and NGOs, apparently.

Bureaucratic delays are always unfortunate and reflect perhaps a misunderstanding of what bureaucracies are capable of doing. In theory, bureaucracies function or take consistent action on the basis of a set of rules and regulations regardless of who is in the management roles, reducing the need for individual decisions, and anxiety over possible mistakes and uncertainty. As it works, uncertain bureaucrats delay activities through application of the negative to cover potential error. Bureaucratic rules are there to justify and speed actions, not delay them, and most actions can be justified by the

rules, if you know the rules and want to take action. (This is perhaps an unusual interpretation of what is possible.)

An example of delay: The reconstruction of the Chah-i-Anjir foot bridge across the Chah-i-Anjir wash, and just outside this farm service town bazaar would have been a very important project start up action: quick, inexpensive and in response to community need, major political impact and good PR. AIP turned this bridge, along with others, over to PRT in late November for action. The work should have taken about two weeks using all labor and skills from Chah-i-Anjir bazaar, and HCC where the disassembled bridge is located. The work may have begun in mid-February under a contractor. I was not involved in the discussions with the PRT on this issue. The bridge should have been in use for the past two months, during the wet season when it is most needed.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

*Shift the responsibility of security for pay day convoys to the local authorities and their police forces. It is their country and it is unlikely that local robbers want a confrontation with the police. With the radio communications in the new project Land Rovers, security back up can be called in if necessary. The local security forces would appreciate further training from project security people that I think is under consideration.*

*Publicly keep an operational distance between AIP and PRT as much as is possible. But continue to offer suggestions for projects to the PRT (they appear to be somewhat isolated) and press for quicker action.*

#### **OUT-OF-PROJECT AREAS:**

The amount of land cultivated in central Helmand but outside the original project areas is an unknown but should be addressed. In 1993, DAI did a satellite/air photo study of land use in central Helmand and concluded that there was less land cultivated, some 11% less, in 1990 than in 1973. They found some 20% of the land cultivated in 1973 was not cultivated in 1990 but some 9% of land not cultivated in 1973 was cultivated in 1990. Much of this last likely related to the out-of-project areas that had been settled during the war and were now being cultivated. This study needs to be repeated to have a clear understanding of the present situation. It would not be surprising to find that there is more than 50% more land being cultivated in the central Helmand than in the 1970s when such settlements and cultivation would not have been allowed.

During the start up period of AIP, we frequently received requests from the farmers in out-of-project areas to work on their irrigation systems, frequently with the *Wolis Wol's* approval. The position of HAVA has been to reject such requests. One justification being that HAVA is said to be continually criticized by in-project-area farmers for not getting adequate irrigation water off the Boghra canal and the out-of-project areas are to blame. This reason is not completely accurate.

We might speculate, based on observations, that there is much more land being irrigated and farmed within the original project areas than ever before, underscoring the need to repeat the 1992 satellite study. It is also very likely that there is more land being double cropped now than in the 1970s. This suggests the need to repeat the 1975 Farm Economic survey. These details, if correct, suggest the reasons for the greater use of Boghra canal water, and less available water in the lower reaches of the system.

During the winter of 1998-99, MCI did the first desilting work in the Boghra canal since the late 1970s. Considerable amounts of silt were removed from selected critical areas of the canal using up to 3000 men a day in hand labor, three large backhoes and one very old dragline. We estimated that some 135,685 cubic meters of silt were removed by the work. This work increased the flow of water through the system but it did not return the canal to designed capacity, and that was five years ago. Silt continues to accumulate from the river and from blowing dust and sand from the desert to the west. Silt in the canal reduces the flow of water through the system and, as noted, all work to remove silt helps. AIP missed it this year.

The fact that gate #1 (of four gates) of the Boghra canal intake has been permanently closed thru breakdown since 2000 also reduces the amount of water through the system. This gate could be easily repaired and put back into service if the various donors would wake up and act.

The fact that the in-project-area farmers do not use water-conserving practices, and farmers in the upper reaches of the system use more than their share of the available water makes farmers in the lower reaches water short and complain. This pattern is not likely to change until the farmers are charged for water, a subject debated since the construction of the Boghra canal in the 1950s. They will learn to use less water more efficiently and effectively if they have to pay for it.

And apparently there has been less available water in the Helmand River during these past years of drought. The Helmand River is the source of water for the Boghra canal.

Considering all these contributing factors, it is not surprising to find that the in-project-area farmers in the lower reaches of the system turn to the same supplementary water sources as the out-of-project farmers use as their primary sources: wells and drainage water. Again, virtually all out-of-project area farmers get their water from sources other than the Boghra canal. As an example of the density of drain water use: there are some thirty water pump sites in the four kilometers between Khushal Kale bridge and the end of the official Nad-i-Ali area where Deep Drains #1 and #2 meet.

As side note, I had drain water samples from the Nad-i-Ali wasteway analyzed by the Colorado State University irrigation water lab in 2002. They concluded that the water was acceptable for irrigation with adequate drainage.

In summary, many of the out-of-project areas have been in use for many years; the farmers and their families have settled and built long term housing: they will not go away just by being ignored. They have developed their own water sources with the use of wells and drain water and are not the reason for the water-short in-project-areas. They are legitimate settlers. But they do need help with their irrigation and drainage systems. Many sites were visited and analyzed at the request of the farmers and local government, in one case the governor. No major excavation work was needed but manual cleaning/expansion of existing channels and the addition of some simple pick up drains would be very useful, quick and inexpensive. The expansion of the AIP into out-of-project areas would be a very useful broadening of the project's scope. With a positive approach, it should not be difficult to get HAVA to agree to have AIP work in out-of-project areas.

## **PROJECT COORDINATION:**

It is obvious there is little communication between the various Helmand projects, NGOs, and donors. It is likely that HAVA and various branches of local government know what is happening in reconstruction and development in Helmand but even this is not certain. As I noted in my 2004 Final Report to RAMP, someone, some organization needs to take the lead in a coordinating effort. In March, I suggested that RAMP take the lead role.

In the context of the alternative income/livelihood program in response to the planned elimination of the opium poppy from the region, one might assume that most agencies have an understanding of what is needed in Helmand: *put the local people to work that have lost and will continue to lose incomes through the poppy eradication program. Wrong.* At the same time that AIP was starting up with the use of an intensive hand labor effort cleaning central Helmand drains, Central Asia Development Group (CADG) with UNOPS funding started the cleaning of sections of the mid-sized S-10.7 lateral, using three backhoes, all of which can be done by hand labor. HAFO wrote a proposal five years ago to clean the entire S-10.7 lateral during one annual shut down period using 1,000 men. The difference between a hand labor project and a heavy equipment project relates to who receives most of the money for the work: the hand laborers vs. the contracting company or organization with the heavy equipment. This ignores the engineers' biases. Three backhoes are easier to manage than 1,000 men. Has the UN been involved in the discussions of the present anti-opium poppy campaign and the tactics to be used? Are they asleep? Perhaps USAID should remind them (UNOPS) of what is happening in Helmand.

Who is going to attempt to coordinate this international, unfocused, disorganized anti-opium poppy program? Does anyone care?

## **CONCLUSION:**

This paper is a brief look at the start-up activities of AIP during my short contract period. We put a large number of men to work on the central Helmand drainage system in a short period of time. But we missed the opportunity to have a well rounded, well publicized, major impact startup action. We have put some 5,000 men to work at a good pay scale and expect to expand the work force in the near future. This is and will continue to have a major impact on the local economy. But we can do more and we can do better. As the project expands geographically and the work force increases, the field management and supervisory problems will increase. With present project systems of limited mobility and communications, we can expect a less effective field operation.

I will be happy to discuss any point or issue raised in this report with anyone who has an interest..

## APPENDIX 1

12 Dec 04

To: The AIP Files

From: Richard B. Scott, AIP Advisor

Subject: Why focus on Central Helmand?

The question is often raised as to why projects should focus on the central Helmand, the area irrigated by the Boghra Canal? Some of the reasons are listed below. But to begin, to generalize about Afghan farmers is to be wrong. Central Helmand is not like most of the rest of agricultural Afghanistan.

1. Central Helmand is the largest irrigation system in Afghanistan with the Helmand River as the source of irrigation water. The Helmand River is said to represent some 40% of all surface water in the country. It is a well irrigated region with bumper crop production, of what ever crop, even in times of drought. In these days of uncertain water, the result of government distribution of a reduced Helmand river, thousands of farmers have dug or drilled wells for supplementary water or they pump water from the drains for irrigation. There appears to be abundant ground water in central Helmand, from 10 to 100 m., depending on region.
2. There is abundant hand labor available in the region resulting from the cash crop, double cropping agricultural system that employs day labor and share croppers. This includes an annual farm labor migration into the region from north Helmand and other provinces to the north that draws thousands of workers into the region every winter.
3. During the poppy bumper crop years, Helmand was said by the UN to produce some 40% of Afghanistan's opium, the top production year being 1999. Before the Russian invasion, central Helmand produced zero opium with agreements between the farmers, the GOA and the U.S. that built most of the irrigation system. There is living memory of this situation.
4. The central Helmand farmers are some of, if not the best and most productive farmers in the country, the result of past experience, training and involvement with a double cropping, cash cropping system with cotton at its base and a government cotton gin as the primary and reliable market, beginning in the mid-60s. Cash crop farmers depend on reliable markets for their produce.
5. The farmers consider opium poppy an evil crop but a good income cash crop with a ready and active market. There is a system of credit in the form of advance partial payment by the buyers for the crop being planted. No other cash crop in the region competes with opium for profit but the farmers do not need it to retain a very viable

cash economy....with a little help with their markets. And there is a small but growing group of addicts present in the region.

6. A program of irrigation rehabilitation work, dialogue, a media blitz, a project supporting the cotton industry and an eradication action reduced opium production in one of the central Helmand districts (Nad-i-Ali) by 85% in one season, 2003.
7. The reason to focus on central Helmand for irrigation and infrastructure rehabilitation and anti-poppy campaigning is because opium poppy can be eliminated from this most productive poppy producing region relatively easily without major economic damage to the population: the greatest positive impact for development dollars.
8. The problem of eliminating poppy from many or most of the other subsistence agricultural areas in the country, especially during this period of drought, is considerably more complex with a much greater potential negative impact on the people.
9. For political and humanitarian reasons, the areas in north Helmand and south of Darwishan must not be ignored. But until it rains and other drought related factors change (dropping ground water tables) these areas will not have much potential for agricultural development. And at their best, these regions are economically marginal and very small scale when compared to central Helmand and most of the population of the province.
10. It would appear most useful to focus first on the areas of greatest potential impact: central Helmand. The marginal areas will benefit from this focus through the traditional patterns of farm labor migration out of these areas and into central Helmand for work in the winter season, assuming the AIP effort is extensive enough to absorb this element.
11. If central Helmand can be taken out of opium production permanently, and it can, it would be an outstanding achievement given the percentage of the total opium production of the country that this region represents. Central Helmand has always been a symbol of modern Afghan agriculture. Central Helmand is a politically and economically powerful region. What happens here will be noted by the other productive, and unproductive, regions of the country, like Nangarhar and Badakshan. It will inform the other regions of the country of the coming elimination of opium poppy production.

Central Helmand is not like most of the rest of Afghanistan in terms of agricultural production. What can be done here relatively easily, to eliminate opium production, cannot likely be duplicated in other regions of the country. To generalize about Afghan farmers is to be wrong.