

(Re-typed Sept. 2012)

To: Charles W. Johnson, D-AD/DP

June 2, 1975

From: Richard B. Scott, DP

Subject: Need for a Systematic Information Program in the Central Helmand Drainage Project

As previously noted in the memo "Payment for On-farm Drains in the Helmand", 1 April 1975, the construction of on-farm drains will have a very different set of problems to cope with when compared with the major drain part of the project. The on-farm drain construction will effect the local farming population more directly than the major drain work in terms of benefits. There will be a need for farmer cooperation with the project. The project will be more complex in the process of organizing, supervising and paying the groups of laborers who will do the digging. The on-farm drains proposed will be dug across farmers' land, not all of whom are going to see in advance the benefit of the work. Since the work is to be done mostly in settlement areas, the landowners will have relatively small farms and some will likely be reluctant to give up the land required for drains right-of-way. One of the major problems to be faced by the project will be communications with the farmers effected.

The farmers have little trust in government actions. In the past, the HAVA tactic in handling potential disagreement over project implementation has been to keep project plans secret and perhaps informally tell farmers whatever seems most acceptable to the farmers regardless of project plans. This was either mis-information or ambiguous information which led to confusion of the issues. In the Shamalan Project this tactic led to some rather serious confrontations in which USAID never became involved, if even informed of events. The logic of the tactic is clear: as long as farmers are not aware of a coming event, they will not have time to organize resistance. Individual farmers faced with the immediate confrontation of a canal right-of-way, for example, can be intimidated. Given time to mobilize their relatives and clansmen, intimidation becomes difficult.

HAVA reactions in the past to suggestions of an information program to win support for and keep the farmers fully informed about a project have been neutral followed by inaction. It has usually been stated that HAVA officials use their own traditional methods in solving such problems, and they do. But these kind of traditional methods do nothing to change the traditional relations between farmer and government that remain a barrier to development. They do not lead to trust or project cooperation. As long as the traditional sorts of government acts (maintain order, collect taxes and conscription) were the limit of farmers-government relations, change was not necessary. The need for cooperation on the part of the farmer was limited. To a great extent, farmers were left on their own. But in a situation where a complex system of modern irrigation is operational, where cash crops and fertilizers are common, where changes and developments should be

part of the self-improving system (like improvement of drainage or the construction of a more efficient branch of irrigation canal) farmer cooperation and involvement are necessary. The traditional relationship is no longer functional.

In the first letter of understanding it is noted that at the end of Phase I of the project the evaluation will include the cultural sensitiveness of the US group. This will be an innovation. But HAVA too should be rated on its cultural sensitiveness to its own farmers, a change. Part of this change should include a systematic information program on the project vis-à-vis the farmers to be effected. Farmer cooperation cannot be assumed in a state of ignorance about project goals. It would be more realistic to assume farmer non-cooperation under these circumstances.

In discussions about the drainage project with HAVA, a great deal of time has been spent on the technical details: inventories of equipment, need for various sorts of technicians, need for soil profiles and as-built drain profiles. But little time has been spent in top-level discussions of the social aspects and research as part of the project. In the past, as USAID phased out of the Shamalan Project and then out of the total Valley involvement, it was stated in numerous reports, and generally accepted in the Mission, that one of the major problems which had not been properly addressed were the social problems, e.g., farmer-project relations. As USAID moves back into a new Valley project, however, USAID has tended to follow HAVA's lead in focusing on the technical details again. There is no reason to assume the results will be different from the past. The actors, the scene and the script have changed little. While the fixed cost reimbursement method is new in financing Helmand Valley development, it does not address the more basic issues of government-farmer relations and social development. To have a project that will make a break from the past, USAID must be involved in the total scene rather than only with the technical details. The first step would be for USAID to insist on a systematic, planned information program that would have as its goal to sell the idea of on-farm drains to reluctant farmers in an informal but comprehensive way. Further, the information program could be developed to insure that all effected farmers would be kept informed of project development and changes. USAID could monitor and aid in the development of such a public relations activity.

In conclusion, the on-farm drain construction will require farmer cooperation (if only passive) since many of the drains are to be dug across land presently being farmed. Farmer cooperation cannot be expected in some areas unless the farmers know what the project is about, what it is trying to accomplish and how it will benefit the farmers. And in some cases, farmer cooperation cannot be expected even with full information. An informal public relations-information activity done on a systematic, thoughtful basis would go far in establishing some level of trust and then cooperation. This would be a break from the past patterns of relations that have sometimes acted as a barrier to development.

The "spread effect" is important to this sort of phased project. That is, the results will be beneficial to the farmers. The results will be identified by the farmers themselves as being beneficial. Other farmers in the area will learn of the beneficial results, of the

process leading to the results, and will desire to participate. An information program associated with the on-farm drain project could lead to such results. It would be a first step.

As a final point, the level and nature of an information program is crucial to success. An interest and push for the activity must come from the governor who would have to have a strong personal commitment. Another office of bodies in HAVA with the title of "Public Information" would be possible but pointless. The keynote of the activity would have to be one of empathy, candor and charisma with the governor taking the lead in this society where things tend to happen under dynamic leadership or not at all.

cc. Mr. Sligh, DD  
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