

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

Scott

TO : Mr. Charles W. Johnson, DAD/DP

DATE: March 6, 1976

FROM : *Scott*
Richard B. Scott, DP

SUBJECT: HAVA Priority of Land Settlement and Potential AID Project Development
in Land Improvement and Drainage

SUMMARY

The settlement statistics presented on p. 29 of the Central Helmand Drainage Project Paper combined with the information presented in my June 30, 1975 memo, "HAVA Priority of Land Settlement and the Central Helmand Drainage Project," suggest the priority that HAVA, as a political as well as a bureaucratic and development arm of the central government, places on land settlement. That is, nearly half again the number of settlers have been settled in the past two years as have been settled in the past twenty years. Recent observations in the valley of the results of this rapid settlement suggest that large amounts of land are being settled of a marginal nature, given the present level of land developed for farming, on plots that will likely result in bare subsistence level agriculture for this generation and migration or sub-subsistence economics for the next generation.

USAID will always be associated with the results to be obtained in the Helmand valley. Thus, the settlement activities in the valley relating to the technical and economic potentials should be closely monitored. Phase II of the Drainage Project could be slightly redirected in terms of the patterns being followed in Phase I, to focus of problems of land development and improvement for the new settlers, many of whom face initial and major drainage problems. Although the sample is small, the selection of project sites for Phase I drainage work appears to follow criteria patterns similar to those followed by RDD in the past, i. e., areas that have filed strong petitions for help under the leadership of strong local political figures. Recent settlers apparently do not fall into this category. As can be expected with the change of USAID's contact within the HAVA bureaucracy, Mr. Formali, there have been shifts away from the original development sites identified in the project paper. No great amount of time or study was used in the initial selection but the sites did include recently or proposed settled areas.



Background: One of the original goals in the establishment of HAVA in the 1950's was the settlement of landless peoples in newly developed areas in the Helmand Valley. One of the target populations were the nomads who winter camp in the region in their traditional transhumance cycle of sheep-goat herding. The results of these attempts at settlement have been mixed by a combination of variables relating to the original potential of the land for cultivation, misuse of irrigation water and a variety of attitudes toward settlement. Some remained as farmers. Some returned to nomadism or other activities. But apparently the conditions for settlement were generally positive. Land was prepared, as were the irrigation systems. Housing and other support was made available. And relatively large plots of land were given per household, depending on the quality or classification of the land. In Nad-i-Ali, for example, the area where the drainage project is presently working, the original settlers in the 50's received 30 jeribs (15 acres).

The Present: Certainly the priorities of HAVA are broader than the single settlement goal of the early years. Increase of production of a variety of crops, like cotton, for processing and export is likely one of several. But land settlement, it has been pointed out by officials and is supposed to be reflected in the new seven-year plan, is still a priority, and with the political implications relating to central government promises and expectations established at the time of the 1973 change of government. The numbers of landless people settled gets wide publicity.

But settlement requires land, and choice developed land is not generally available. Although the example of exceptional land like the distributed government seed farm in Darwishan can be cited, the more marginal examples like the previously unfarmed areas of Darwishan flood plain, which requires leveling, drainage and an organized irrigation system, are more common. Other recently or proposed settled very marginal areas include: sections of Block 9 of south Marja along the road to Darwishan; the area on the desert side of outlet Drain C in East Marja; West Marja (usually thought of as "out-of-project"); the Tabila area of central Shamalan near Gowergi Seed Farm; the Zorist area of South Shamalan, to list the few that have come under immediate observation. Some of these areas are classed as "out-of-project" lands but this phrase has little meaning when the farmers have been officially settled onlands

adjacent to project lands and receive their irrigation water via the Boghra Canal.

Small Plots: Under the new settlement rules, the farmers are being given 12 je ribs (6 acres) of land per household and, as far as I have been able to learn, virtually no other assistance or training is offered. In the area of our drainage project in Nad-i-Ali some new settlers have been given land abandoned by previous settlers but each household received half of an original 27 jerib plot, and unlike the original settlers, no housing site in the village. There is a plan apparently under consideration to further reduce the size of plot to an even 10 je ribs per household. Although this grossly reduced amount of land for settlement allows a greater concentration of farmers per area, it likely, combined with the other details of settlement, increases the chances of economic failure, land abandonment, or marginal subsistence agriculture. Apparently HAVA intends to maintain a relatively high level, in terms of numbers, of new land settlement over the next few years. The smaller plots simplifies the process in terms of readily available land.

In the past, U.S. technicians have surveyed and considered the problem of an economic farm size. Entomologist Jerry Rann in 1973, in an "insect survey" in East Shamalan, Nad-i-Ali, and Marja, found an average of 11.6 people per family supported per farm or 2.1 jeribs per person and estimated "...that minimum subsistence living on irrigated land in this country requires $\frac{1}{2}$ jerib per person." His primary experience in Afghanistan was about 6+ years working in the Helmand Valley.

Agricultural Economist Gerry Owens in 1971 analyzed, in a brief paper "Small Land Holders in the Shamalan," a sample of landholders in Shamalan with farms of 10 jeribs or less (11 of the 62 farms in the 1970 Farm Economics Survey Shamalan sample) or 18 percent of the original sample. He points out that about 50 percent of the landholdings in the area, according to the Land Inventory Survey, are about 10 jeribs or less but that this does not relate to farm size. He does not elaborate on the statement but some of my studies of these records in the same area indicate that the landholdings of any particular farmer are commonly fragmented, i. e., not located in one field but in several. Dr. Owens indicates that while the small, fragmented farms (located in one of the most productive areas of Helmand) grew combinations of wheat, some fruit, cotton and forage crops, and five double-cropped corn with their wheat, and had an average net farm income

of almost twice that compared to the 1964 Tarzi-Stevens Report, that 4 of the 11 farms were at or below subsistence level. Such farmers tend to divide their time between their own land and being share-croppers or farm labor for others. Incomes since that time have likely increased with increased double-cropping and the increased price of cotton, along with increased costs of living and fertilizer.

The point being made is that the perhaps political expedient of settling farmers on 10-12 jeribs of land is likely the institutionalization of subsistence agriculture for this generation of settlers in the valley. In some cases, they are being settled on land where previous farmers have failed with double the amount of land. With the Muslim rules of inheritance of equal division of property among the sons (daughters will not be mentioned here because their lesser legal share is not usually claimed), the next generation will certainly be at sub-subsistence level which suggests perhaps urban migration, a downward drift into sharecropping or seasonal farm labor (assuming mechanization has not already displaced most sharecropping patterns as in other parts of the world, already beginning here), and associated socio-political problems. These landless farmers being settled in many cases on very marginal land, are generally happy or at least uncomplaining with their immediate condition. They have more than they had before which was nothing.

Phase I of the Drainage project is focusing on one of the major technical problems of the irrigation systems in the Helmand. It is primarily a test phase to insure that AID and HAVA can work together. The areas being worked on or are under consideration for work tend to be those from which the farmers have filed strong petitions for government help with their drainage problems. Commonly these effective petitions are organized and headed by local land owner-farmer, political figures (which means some level of wealth relative to their neighbors), who understand the workings of the bureaucracy. HAVA cannot be faulted on this sort of choice of area to work in for Phase I. Politically such choices are politically expedient vis-a-vis the local scene, and also vis-a-vis USAID where sub-project failure because of farmer conflict could not be left to chance.

Phase II: Given the broader picture in the valley, outlined above and the yet to be determined areas where work would be accomplished, USAID could begin to discuss at the highest levels this perhaps new criteria for project area selection. There is not likely to be strong opposition to such a focus. It could serve several purposes. First, this emphasis would perhaps better fit the Congressional goal of having projects that benefit the poorest of the poor. The new settlers are likely to fit this category, or if not immediately, they will as their resources are used for getting established. As noted above, those areas submitting effective petitions, with political follow-up, are not likely of this poorest category. Second, it could lead to quieting our critics within HAVA who say that our project could get more benefit over wider areas for the same funding. For example, it appears that the area for work in the Bolan area of Shamalan, resulting from a petition for help, at most effects an area about 800 meters long and at most 500 meters wide with the actual amount of land not under cultivation with bad drainage totaling about 45-50 jeribs or 25 acres. Third, USAID would remain within the bounds of technical drainage work but with a better opportunity to work with farmers who have yet to establish themselves politically or systems of poor water management, being recently settled. Most have recognized the major problems they face and would welcome help. Bureaucratically, new settlers are in a much weaker position to oppose such developments even if they were to decide to oppose. Fourth, this focus on newly settled and proposed for settlement lands would probably have more longer term benefits than a less oriented area for work selection system. Fifth, this focused involvement could result in USAID being in a better position to make suggestions on economic farm size for settlement. The present settlement farm size may be politically expedient for the immediate present but very short sighted in terms of future planning, not an unusual circumstance for any government bureaucracy.

A Change: This memo represents a shifting of ground from a position taken in the June 30, 1975 memo referenced above, which warned against the inadvertent inclusion of newly settled areas on the grounds that the USAID goal was to get HAVA to develop, use and adequately maintain the irrigation system they have before becoming involved in further expanding the system. But settlement on a large scale, in or outside "project" land, is reality and a HAVA goal. It would be an error with long term consequences to ignore this reality.

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