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Memorandum

TO : Mr. Charles W. Johnson, D-AD/DP DATE: February 1, 1976

FROM : Richard B. Scott

SUBJECT: Attitudes towards a Complete System of On-Farm Drains: The Farmers, HAVA and USAID/SCS; and the Need for a Farmer Information Program

We are told, and can work under the assumption, that virtually all the farmers in the area in Nad-i-Ali in which we are working on on-farm drains, have petitioned the Government for help with the area's drainage problem. A quick survey of the many salt-white fields indicates that there is a salting/drainage problem.

Within the past month a final plan has been worked out for a system of on-farm drains in the area of Zargun Kala village of Nad-i-Ali. It includes on-farm drains at about 50-meter spacing with variation based on placing as many of the drains as possible on field boundaries.

Within the past 10 days field surveys have identified fields with present owners' names and measured field boundaries. This is an area of settlers, most of whom have been there, or their fathers, for the past 20 years. They do not have clear title to their land - which is to come after final payments.

There is a recognized need among the USAID/SCS team for an extension-type activity with the to-be-affected farmers to explain in detail the on-farm drainage plan to gain their agreement and support. While the farmers requested and do support the drainage work in general terms, they do not yet know how the present plan will affect their landholdings, not in terms of ditch frequency and layout nor in terms of results expected. This should be the work of an extension/information program activity. Since the detailed drainage plan and the list of farmer/owners are only recent products, there has been little opportunity for such work or for discussion of such an activity among the counterparts.

The lack of such detailed information among the farmers was illustrated by two recent events. First was an interview with perhaps the most influential man in Zargun Kala, who - it was said - was a past representative to the National Assembly and whose household, a large and extended kin unit, has perhaps 120 jeribs in the first square kilometer to be developed. He praised and welcomed

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the opening drainage work in his area but knew nothing of the detailed plan for on-farm drainage. His land had already seen limited but inadequate results from some earlier food-for-work drainage work and had himself put in some shallow on-farm drains on his land. When the plan was briefly explained to him, the first responses were: that such a plan was too expensive, that it took too much land out of cultivation, and that it would not likely do any good, based on his own experience with inadequately designed and placed on-farm drains. He did accept the idea of the long, deep boundary border drains like those presently to be hand-dug. But he suggested that he be given the financial support and he, with his own labor force, would dig the drain down his border.

The second event reflecting farmer ignorance of the drainage plans was reported by Baqi, the HAVA field supervisor of the hand-dug drain work. He reported that several of the farmers who own land along the presently being-dug drain approached him to inquire if this work was going to cost them anything.

In summary, the farmers do not know what is being or has been planned for their fields relative to drainage. An information program is required in the immediate future among the 20 or so landowner/settlers in the first square kilometer as a group, and also as smaller units of men who have land along the larger individual border drains. As suggested by SCS personnel, this should include example plots being staked out to show the extent of the planned drains, and for each farmer to see how his land will be affected. This should not be a one-meeting activity, but in stages involving the various affected groups. The activity should stress not only what will be done in construction, but extension information on what sort of increases in crop yields can be expected, given a completed system. This means the involvement of not only engineers, but also agriculture personnel.

The assumption behind an information program about the project is that if the farmers understand what is to be done and what the results will be, and believe what they understand, that there will be acceptance and support. The activity may not be all that effective. There are usually some dissenters, no matter how good such an activity may be. Hopefully, the negative reactions are not among the most influential of farmers. Probably some system should be worked out where at some point along the way, when the farmers of a block clearly understand how the project will affect them as individuals, the farmers should be given a choice to cooperate with the work,or the development unit (in this case the square kilometer) would be dropped. The cutting point should probably be around 75-80 percent of farmers' agreement, and they should know this. FAO, for example, in the past, had such a system worked out for

agreement on land consolidation schemes. Projects based on such agreement hold fewer unpleasant surprises for those responsible for implementation.

Mr. Asef, head of the HAVA soils lab, past Field Chief of Food-for Work in Helmand, and present member of the committee for the study of the hand-dug drain work (see Memorandum dated November 9, 1975, "Elements in Organizing Farmer Work-Groups for the Helmand Drainage Project) suggested to stress the importance of maintaining the drains after completion, keeping them clean of earth and greenery, and getting signed agreements from the farmers to do this work on a yearly basis, and perhaps requiring payment if the government is required to carry out this farmer responsibility. In this and other areas there is a striking difference between the well farmer-maintained irrigation ditches and the overgrown drains, even the small ones.

In the past, HAVA has been lax in its activities to inform and educate the farmers about projects of change. The reasons have apparently been several. First, they have not seen the need to inform, apparently assuming (stated) that they know what the farmer thinks, knows, needs, and wants and with such consensus an information program has no real point. There are examples from the recent past that proved this assumption to be incorrect and resulted in negative farmer response at critical stages of project development.

Second, USAID has not insisted on nor aided in such information activities, assuming that the above HAVA explanation is correct and this aspect being defined primarily as a HAVA responsibility. The appropriate U.S. personnel have generally not been a part of similar projects in the past, nor are they defined in this project. Perhaps this should be considered for Phase II staffing.

Third, in projects that involve potential elements of conflict with farmers (like right-of-way requirements for ditches), HAVA has used the element of farmer ignorance as a tactic. If the farmers do not know about a plan they might not agree with until late in the project, until they are actually faced with a ditch being dug across their land they will not have time to organize as a body against it. And if ditch or lateral construction is completed up to some point, it is too late to stop what is already planned and half completed because of the protests of the one farmer being directly affected.

This brings up the question of how complete a drainage system HAVA desires or sees necessary, given their present political as well as economic goals. At all stages in this analysis we must keep in mind that to some degree HAVA is in a similar situation vis-a-vis USAID, as the farmers are vis-a-vis HAVA.

That is, they have asked for aid with their drain system and signed agreements to do work on both major drains and hand-dug on-farm drains, but they were not aware of the full details nor extent of what a complete, maximum effective, drainage system would include.

Very early in the project discussions with Mr. Formali, when the mention of possible 50-meter spacing was made, the response was that we must consider perhaps doubling the ideal spacing and see what happens. The reasons being the costs and the experimental state of drainage scientific knowledge. Apparently in one HAVA staff meeting the budget submitted for this project by Mr. Formali was highly criticized because of the spending of the limited HAVA funds to make what might be considered adequately drained land a model of good drainage. Thus we must consider that there are elements within HAVA that do not see the need for a drainage system approaching perfection but for a drainage system that is adequate to allow farmers/settlers to produce acceptable crop levels. It has only been in recent years that HAVA has taken drainage seriously. As noted previously, the main priority is some land development for massive land settlement action, a political priority of the Central Government.

In recent statements by Mr. Shuja and other members of his staff, there is the same lack of priority being placed on the development of a complete drainage system, not the close spacing of on-farm drains. The double-distance spacing has been noted several times. Part of this lack of placing of priority on technically correct drainage may be attributed to a lack of understanding about the mechanics of on-farm drains and what results can be expected in increased yields. This appears to be a situation similar to that with the farmers, although many of the HAVA staff are engineers with years of exposure to U.S. technicians in the Helmand. SCS presently has a drainage training program going for HAVA staff.

On a field trip into the project area of Zargun Kala, Mr. Asef repeated the doubt that the complete drainage plan for the first square kilometer as presently visualized by the USAID/SCS team was needed. He suggested an experimental, staged approach, putting down a network of test pits to monitor ground water levels as the project progresses and to stop when acceptable levels are reached. This seems a reasonable approach but it could also be used as a delaying tactic to reduce the on-farm drain work to levels acceptable to HAVA -- that is, less than complete by the plan. This past week, a member of the Planning Section requested of the SCS team permission to dig a series of test pits in this project area - basically that suggested to me by Mr. Asef. Even if the staged approach does not become part of the development plan, we

can expect the monitoring to have the same effect.

The USAID/SCS team is very much aware of the range of HAVA desires and the complexity of the total situation of the drainage project. Their position is basically that their job is to help develop an adequate drainage system for the project areas and this first square kilometer is a testing and training ground for HAVA personnel as well as the farmers. It is an area where the results of good drainage can be demonstrated from the start of the project and that anything less than a technically correct system would be a poor start. It would be useful, perhaps for once in the Helmand, to have a completed, technically correct land area with a demonstration of potential.

I suspect the HAVA response to this position, if the situation occurred where a response was clearly stated, would be that such a plan is expensive, time-consuming, and not replicable at present to the entire area and therefore is not needed, even if HAVA were to set a priority of developling land to maximum production levels, which they have not. Indirectly, but consistently, HAVA personnel at several levels have stated their desires. If USAID continues to press for the completed system, we should expect to encounter blocks, both technical and socio-cultural.

In the present state of ignorance of the farmers about the project or at any stage along the line of an information program, if it were instituted, the farmers can be used to delay or block the on-farm drain construction. Negative responses from farmers can be expected to be real in the sense that they do not understand or believe what the stated results of the drains will be. They may not be willing to give up the amount of land required to see if the experiment, in their eyes, works. They may receive false or ambiguous information about what the project is trying to accomplish. There are many variations, most of which have been experienced in the past. If HAVA does not want the complete system, it will be simple enough to block, if stated appeals are ignored.

Since the farmers in the Zargun Kala area are settlers and do not have title to their land, there is the at least theoretical power of HAVA to force through the total drainage system if they desire. On the ground, it is not so simple if the farmers decide against the total scheme. First, there is a very influential man who lives in this first area, already interviewed. Second, if they can petition as a group for help, they can petition to have it stopped if they decide it is against their better interests. Third, such requests are

generally heeded since they could result in the situation being brought to the attention of the central government via personal contacts and influence, group petition of objection, or overt acts of dissent -- all of which reflect badly on local bureaucracy. Fourth, there is always the potential of bodily harm to officials who might push an unpopular action. In summary, while it may appear that HAVA has the power to complete the trial on-farm drain project area, they may not and generally do not attempt to use such power except under extreme circumstances. Conflict is generally avoided.

IN CONCLUSION: HAVA has, over time, fairly clearly indicated its reluctance to spend the money necessary to develop technically perfect drainage for limited areas, given their other priorities. Besides reflecting central government desires in other areas of priority, e.g. land settlement, internal HAVA politics are likely also involved, making support for such a development difficult. It is likely that the need for such a level of technical perfection is not understood at the leadership level and perhaps at the technician level also, making the sole pressure result from USAID. It is likely that from the earliest stages of project development that such a plan was not expected or understood. In the same way, the farmers did not likely expect the level of drainage proposed when they petitioned the government for help.

A detailed information scheme should be worked out for the farmers, for HAVA technicians and HAVA leadership, so that the implications of the drainage project are clearly understood by all. Then, it would appear useful to get these concerned parties to clearly register their desires relative to what is planned, once they understand it, and allow the project to be guided to some degree by these desires; they will not reflect strictly technical concerns, but socio-cultural and political as well. Perhaps the staged system of drain development should be seriously considered. Along with the other usual delays, the timing of these stages may not be too far off normal. USAID does not want to push HAVA into elements of a project that it does not want which could lead to future complications and misunderstandings.

A final related recommendation is that in at least Phase II, USAID should seriously consider adding an extension/educator/water management man to project staffing - who would work with HAVA to develop specific units of information relating to this project and get it into the field. To sell the idea of the usefulness of on-farm drains at close intervals in Nad-i-Ali is needed now. To train and develop a system for the use and required maintenance of the drains will need considerable work. This will mean working not only with the farmers, but also with the local mirabs or water masters who are

key figures in solving the irrigation/drainage complex of problems in the Valley. This work should begin in earnest with the first square kilometer presently being developed, if the desired results are to be realized. And it gets USAID to the key issue discussed through the years but not squarely faced: Water Management.

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