

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

TO : Mr. Charles W. Johnson - DP

DATE: March 14, 1976

FROM : Richard B. Scott

SUBJECT: TDY for an Educator/Water Management Technician for the Helmand Drainage Project: A Sense of Urgency

The question has been raised on why the urgency to have an Educator/Water Management Technician TDY for Phase I of the Helmand Drainage Project. This memo will attempt to answer that question, with some background on HAVA and information to the farmers relative to AID projects.

1. The educator/water management activity is necessary if the maximum benefits are to be gained from the drain construction in the shortest period of time. As has been learned, perhaps, with the construction and subsequent misuse of the Helmand irrigation system over the years, the construction of a drainage system is a very technical first step in solving a particular set of problems. But the construction of the facilities alone does not necessarily solve the problem. The key is how the system is put into use. If those who are to benefit from the system do not clearly understand how and why a system is to be used in a certain way, full benefits are not likely to occur.

The role of the educator/water management technician should have been in play before the drain work actually started, not only with the farmers but within HAVA itself, where the need for and definition of good drainage, and the potential benefits to be gained, are not clearly - if at all - understood. Some of our chief critics within HAVA, while educated specialists in various fields (including Agriculture Economics), do not see the need to spend the sums of money necessary to bring poorly drained land into maximum production. If through lack of understanding on the part of the farmers in the areas to be developed, the results of the expenditure are not relatively quick and outstanding, we can expect continued and perhaps stronger opposition to the project within HAVA. Politically, then, the need for someone to work with the farmers and the officials from the start is important.

2. Any training/implementation activity is easier to work with and develop if it is done on a small scale first. In the Nad-i-All area, the land along the collector drains, # 5 - 9, will be the first to have completed drainage systems. The technician can, with a counterpart, begin to work with individual and small groups of farmers, 5 - 6 persons, as their lands become ready for the leaching process.



This will also involve working with the Mirab (local water-master) since the process of leaching requires more water than is normally put on a field. The work further requires coordinating field activities with the soils lab and technicians because the leaching process, while flushing out the salts, reduces the fertility of the soil as well. Changes in soil nutrients have to be monitored and remedial action taken by the farmer. Left alone in the leaching process it is possible that a farmer could reduce productivity with the new drainage system.

3. If the technician is made available, during Phase I AID can measure the HAVA and farmer response to such an activity and consideration can be given to the possibility of establishing a permanent position within the drainage project. If the idea of such an activity is rejected by HAVA, careful consideration should be given to the real purpose of constructing drainage systems. If HAVA does not accept the idea of systematically informing the beneficiaries of the project, its purpose and use, and does not accept the idea that training farmers into the proper use of the system is important, AID must consider if the project as a whole is worth pursuing.

It would appear that a test of HAVA along these lines would be as important as the evaluation of the project to date, which has primarily been confined to a long series of technical details.

The idea of an educator/water management technician is not from HAVA, and AID should not expect it to be. The implications of such an activity are not part of the HAVA bureaucratic work style in dealing with the farmers - which has been outlined numerous times in memos over the past five years. It should be an activity, however, that AID should insist upon in any similar project involving local populations in the same way AID insists on certain standards in mixes of concrete to be poured. It has never been insisted on in the past and the results have been, among other things: a major irrigation system that has never been properly utilized for maximum benefits; in some cases the mis-use of water has taken land out of production; and, in the case of the Shamalan Project, a situation where the project was not completed (the reason given by HAVA was farmer rejection, though the farmers had never been clearly or fully informed of project goals and benefits) and a major political rift in working relationships between AID and HAVA occurred.

The SCS team in the Valley has concurred and forwarded the idea of having an educator/water management/agriculturist as part of the project. Apparently the SCS in the U.S. has personnel with the necessary qualifications attached to its projects. For a variety of reasons, the SCS would probably be the logical source for recruitment of the needed TDY skills.

The urgency of the request for the TDY services, then, is not a spur-of-the-moment idea and relates not only to the needs of the immediate project but also to past events in HAVA involving some of the same group of people. In this case, the AID memory is not short, and to quote obviously some famous person "those who ignore history or the past are destined to relive it."

Some quotes from past memos might be useful:

April 3, 1971, "Comments on Programs" (on a field trip to the Helmand, Shamalan Project), p. 2:

"2. The Shamalan Project: From the various discussions I have had with Government and villagers, there has not been a clear, consistent picture of the details of how the project is to function. This includes numerous statements from villagers in the area who seem to be the least informed...but some indications of potential problem areas were clear; the first, just mentioned, being that the people to be affected most by the project have not been subjected to any sort of long term contact -- explanation, i. e., public relations."

May 6, 1971, "Further Studies in the Shamalan Valley", p. 2:

"3. Information: To this time no villager has been found who has had any direct contact with the government officials about the outline of the project.... (p. 3) Some sort of a district meeting seems called for if we expect the bulk of the population to know what is happening... The lack of information is reflected in the wide variety of rumors in the area about the project...."

November 24, 1971, "The North Shamalan: A Survey of Land and People" p. 3-4:

"Recommendations

1. HAVA must establish a comprehensive information program which includes but is not limited to the extension agents' activities, to keep the people informed of the project's activities and goals. This would be a generalized public information activity as well as one whose function it would be to explain to the individual farmer how the project is to affect him. This

would mean the establishment of a public information section, preferably headed by someone from the region with some experience in communications, extension, public health work, etc. He might find valuable assistance from Peace Corps volunteers. This is not something to be accomplished in a day or a month but a continuous activity during the life of the Shamalan project. It is further not an activity which would be secondary to any already established group but a newly established unit with responsibility to inform every level of Shamalan society what is happening and what the plans for the future involve. It might be a section of the extension service but clearly with this responsibility as its raison d'etre.

Such a unit would have to have access to information and personnel from any other section of HAVA to carry out its job. "

In total there were about 8-10 memos extending into 1972 with similar observations and recommendations including one entitled, "Attitudes toward the Shamalan Canal Project in the Said Village: Aynak, the "Crisis Syndrome", and the Continued Need for Public Information," April 4, 1972.

Then, November 8, 1972, "The Beginning of the Crunch: A statement and Analysis of Present Village Attitudes in the North Shamalan," p. 1-2:

"There has been 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. "

But there are enough quotes from past projects to illustrate the lack of action in this area by both AID and HAVA, and the results. During the life of the Helmand Drainage Project, there have been at least two or three memos whose main focus has been on this problem of information and training. It is an activity that USAID must insist upon if the spirit, if not the letter, of the Congressional mandate to help the rural poor, farmers, is to be reality. A project does not help farmers by simply constructing a system of ditches. There must be explanation and training along with the construction to be meaningful and to have the expected results. And this training should begin before the construction and continue through the first application of water to the land, until the maximum benefits of the expenditure are realized.

The sooner this activity begins the better; the technician to do the work is already 6 months behind schedule.

As a closing statement/example, the farmer, who owns the plot of land at the corner of drains 2N and 5, where the first hand-labor began with on-farm drain construction in February, stated that he was called out to his field on the morning the work began, told where drain 5 was to be dug, cutting his land holding in half, and asked if he agreed. He did agree, and the project was very lucky.

The need for the training technician is urgent.

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