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## **Extension Services in Afghanistan**

Food security has become a large issue all over the world. Many countries are faced with thousands of people barely sustaining enough food for daily life. Afghanistan is one of those countries that deserve serious consideration in its cry for help. For almost 30 years, Afghanistan has suffered economically. After the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1979, technology, knowledge, and skill were wiped out. The Russians were later forced out of Afghanistan, but yet civil war and wars have continued to plague Afghans. Once the Taliban military and leaders established its force, Afghani way-of-life continued to look particularly bleak (CIA Fact Book, 2008).

Afghan farmers are constantly persuaded to grow poppies/opium that is later used to make heroin. Taliban leaders encourage the production of opium, for they create revenue from the farmers and which helps to finance the Taliban efforts. With farmers choosing to grow opium instead of crops like wheat or nuts, there becomes a shortage in staple foods. This limited supply and great demand causes the rise of food prices. Many Afghans make a minimal wage, and find providing for his family tough. Relief organizations like the United Nations, World Food Program, and various groups have been working hard to provide aid for Afghans, although more needs to be done. To this day aid organizations bring in tons of food on a daily basis, despite serious danger. The need for resources is outrageous, and there never seems to be enough funding or food to please even the majority (Afghan Conflict Monitor, 2008). A **long term** solution to this major issue, is teaching Afghans to feed themselves. Evidence of Afghanistan's potential is clear from 1919 to 1979, when Afghanistan was a prosperous, independent country (CIA Fact Book, 2008). One should believe that with the reform of new government and more freedoms, self sufficiency should be within reach. If the world community can be successful of establishing and effective Extension service we hopefully would be able to make a long term impact and implement knowledge for the Afghani people. With a self sufficient agriculture Afghanistan may once again be able to build a strong and sustainable economy. A combination of advanced technology for farmers and seminars to learn practical farming practices could enable this reform to occur (Jones, Clause, Holz-Clause, 2008).

## **Background**

Afghanistan is a tough country made of tough people, whom have had many struggles through the years. To quickly recap the history of Afghanistan, the Pashtun tribes were united in 1747. The country served as a buffer between British and Russian empires, until it won its independence from Britain in 1919. From 1919 to 1979, Afghanistan was self sufficient in food production until the Soviet Union invaded the country in 1979. This commenced a long and destructive war. After the Soviet Union withdrew in 1989, there was a series of civil wars. In 1996, Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, and much of the country fell under Taliban rule. Following the terrorist attacks in 2001, U.S. and its allied forces toppled the Taliban and established a military presence in Afghanistan. In 2004, Hamid Karzi became the first democratically elected president (CIA Fact Book, 2008). As we know from news accounts, the stability of Afghanistan from Taliban insurgents remains a continuous challenge today.

During the ten years of Soviet occupation, almost every vestige of infrastructure was destroyed. Irrigation ditches that carried water to arid lands were obliterated. Passable roads to many villages and communities were destroyed. Electricity became a luxury and only found in urban areas. To this day, there continues to remain very limited electric grid, and most electricity that is available is generated from diesel generators brought to the country by aid workers. The economy of Afghanistan is slowly recovering from decades of conflict and this past year had significant setbacks with drought and

increasing insurgent activity. This poor, landlocked country remains highly depended on foreign agricultural aid and trade with neighboring countries. Afghanistan was ranked the fifth least developed country in the world (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2008).

Unfortunately, much of Afghanistan's agricultural energy is devoted to the production of opium, made from poppies. Other crops like wheat, fruit, and nuts hold a small percentage of production. In fact, despite aid efforts to try to provide other agricultural alternatives to farmers, 2007 poppy cultivation increased 17 percent from the previous year. Afghanistan is currently the world's largest producer of opium. The Taliban and other anti governmental groups participate in and profit from the drug trade, and widespread corruption impedes counter-drug efforts. The majority of heroin, grown from poppies, eventually makes its way into the European drug market (CIA Fact Book, 2008).

From interviews I have conducted with aid workers who have been to Afghanistan, it is very difficult to convince farmers to grow anything but poppies. The decision to grow poppies or not is made at the village level by the village leaders. If the decision is made to grow poppies for the Taliban or other groups, then all farmers in the region grow poppies (DuBruille, 2008). To help provide money for the crop and finance the farmer throughout the year, the farmers are given usually \$500 once the poppies are planted. At harvest, the remainder of the money is paid to the poppy producer. Afghanistan produces more than 90 percent of the world supply of opium, which happens to be planted at the same time as wheat in October to November. Since the poppy crop was so large in 2007, there is a severe shortage of wheat in Afghanistan (Afghan Conflict Monitor, 2008). The determination for the availability of wheat in Afghanistan in 2009 will be made in the coming month and will affect the fate of the country in the coming years.

As a result of poppies being planted instead of wheat along with drought in the central and northern regions, it is estimated that more than a quarter of the population (nine million people) are facing starvation and acute food shortage this coming winter. In 2007, around 25,000 children died of starvation (Afghan Conflict Monitor, 2008). A young girl in Kabul named Fatima stated, "It has been ages since I had a piece of fruit- what I wouldn't give for an orange right now!" (A Kid's Life, 2008). Foods like fruits, wheat, and meat have seen an increase in price of more than 30 percent in the past year (CIA Fact Book, 2008).

Factors such as limited natural fresh water and inadequate supplies of potable water also affect agriculture. Around 23.26 cubic kilometers of water are used a year. Two percent of that water goes to domestic use, leaving 98 percent of the consumption for agriculture. This creates a problem when comparing it to the only 65 cubic kilometers of renewable water resources. Another issue is soil degradation caused by poor farming practices and wind erosion. Deforestation, the destruction of forests, has also created a major problem in soil degradation. Many Afghans are cutting down valuable trees for building or fuel (CIA Fact Book, 2008).

### **Typical Rural Afghan Family and Issues Affecting Food Security**

The typical Afghan family will almost never have grand parents living. The average life span of an Afghan is 44 years old. A male in the family, if he has any education at all, would have attended school for 8-9 years. Females on the other hand are rarely educated past four years. The majority of labor is devoted to agriculture at 80 percent. Industry accounts for 10 percent of the labor force, leaving 10 percent of the people employed in services. Most likely a typical Afghan family has four to five children, although the mother probably has give birth to six or seven children. Several of the children would die before reaching the age of 18. Unemployment is another major factor in every day life. An average of 40 percent of Afghans, are unemployed. This in return puts the population below the poverty line at 53 percent (CIA Fact Book, 2008).

A typical and fortunate diet of a farm family in Afghanistan consists of 1,755 kilo calories. This number can be compared to the world average of 2,808 kilo calories. From the 1,755 kilo calories a “well off” family would consume around 375 kilo calories from some type of animal product a day (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2002). Although there are regional variations in food consumed, the most common food eaten is flat naan bread, made of wheat. The price of naan has increase from 50 to 100 percent in recent months. The western region consumes the highest calories from cereals/tubers with wheat being the predominant calorie source. In the north eastern region, rice is the most frequently eaten staple in the country. Vegetable and fruit consumption makes up only two percent of the Afghan diet. Protein sources only account for two to three percent of the daily diet. If a protein source is available, it is most likely chicken. In a typical year, about 70 percent of a family’s income will be spent on food. However, this is not a typical year. The price of wheat in Afghanistan this year has increased to as much as \$50 for a 40 pound sack. An average price in the United States would be about \$6.50. The price of wheat this year is particularly high due to the drought and the switch from growing opium instead of wheat (Afghanistan Conflict Monitor, 2008).

An Afghani woman is at a major disadvantage compared to men. During the Taliban rule, Afghan women’s rights were destroyed. The right to govern and an education were stripped away. Many important aspects of every day life were denied like the right to hospitals, and employment for women became nonexistent. Even with a democratic government women still find these rights impossible due to threats and security risks. Also due to a woman’s safety, she is limited in her movements. During the Taliban regime, women were rarely allowed in public. One law prohibited women from driving cars to limit movement. In terms of agriculture, women may work in that field although rarely own their own land. Women whom do own land most likely inherited it (Gender Equality, 2008).

The past year has developed into more insecurity for Afghanistan. Afghanistan consists of a population around 26 million. Out of the 26 million, 2.55 million have been recently classified as in need of an “emergency safety net.” The United Nations and Afghani government conducted this assessment, which was released in December of 2007. Since the release, food prices continued to rise, positioning more people towards vulnerability. MAIL, Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, reported in June 2008, the number of vulnerable people grew to 3.5 million. The Afghanistan government has labeled this crisis as a, “humanitarian catastrophe,” and have discussed plans of action (Afghanistan Conflict Minor, 2008).

Afghans face a major set back when dealing with outside aid. There have been multiple attacks on relief programs from bombing of food convoys to threats from terrorists. This targeting has induced a major tamper in the progress of reform and reconstruction. United Nations organizations are becoming the main target for terrorist threats and attacks. The deaths on aid workers are projected at being the highest seen since U.S. led invasion in 2001. The World Food Program estimated a loss of 800 tons of food in the first six months of 2008. This deficit could have been used to feed around 80,000 people for one month. Despite the danger, relief programs continue to risk supplies and lives to aid Afghanistan (Attacks on Aid, 2008).

One example of attack to aid was brought to reality in Ghor Province in central Afghanistan. The World Food Program (WFP) has a project that distributes food for children in school. This program enabled 93,000 of the 150,000 students to take home rations of wheat. This project, Take Home Wheat, would distribute 4,680 metric tons of food to school children in need. Unfortunately, on July 24, 2008, armed men attacked a 49 truck convoy. This WFP hired convoy was headed from Kandahar to Herat. The outcome of the attack left two trucks burning and eight others stolen. According to the UN Assistant Mission, in Afghanistan an estimated 320 metric tons of food was lost. This loss is equivalent to feeding 38,400 people a month (Afghanistan: Attacks hit WFP, 2008).

### **Extension: a Needed Program to Help**

Extension programs are extremely necessary to helping Afghanistan prosper by helping to develop human and social capital. There is a dire need to introduce new technology and farming techniques to provide both increased yields and develop the skill sets of the farmers. There has been virtually no new information on agricultural production introduced into the country for 30 years. Just take a moment to reflect on how agriculture and food production has changed and increased over the past 30 years to understand Afghanistan's loss. In Afghanistan it did not just stand still, but actually fell behind because of the increasingly deteriorating infrastructure (ditches, roads, etc.) (DuBruille, 2008). Temporary aid is not sufficient enough to sustain a country for a long period. A Chinese Proverb simplifies the need for extension services in the quote, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." This quote holds true to the need for skill as well as knowledge.

An extension program must include a number of factors in order to succeed. Competent teachers must be willing to share their knowledge with Afghans and provide training, research and practice by which the Afghans may follow. Vital to teaching is the awareness that adults will be the prime target for educating. Along with directly educating adults, extension programs must begin implementing basic understanding into younger levels, this includes male and female. Under each circumstance, the ability to successfully interact with diverse individuals and groups is especially important (Jones, Clause, Holz-Clause, 2008).

To conquer a project of this multitude, it will require universities, countries, and organizations such as United Nations to be on board to provide its services. Setting requirements would be necessary to keep each participant on track. Requirements such as recruitment, financing, and training seminars to organize thoughts and ideas would be feasible for the participants. Financing will be important to starting Afghanistan with new and advanced technology. Once started, Afghans can begin to use their own income to continue to update to new technology. Finally, the participants, universities or organizations, must send delegates to visit Afghanistan to gain a complete understanding of the project ahead (Jones, Clause, Holz-Clause, 2008).

A major wall that must be overcome is convincing farmers to grow other crops than opium. Enticing farmers with a premium to grow crops like wheat or nuts would help supply them with adequate finances for the first couple of years. Another barrier is showing village leaders the benefits of diverse crops. At first this may come as a challenge, but once accomplished, diverse crops may be seen often (DuBruille, 2008).

One can see the hardships Afghanistan has been faced with since the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1979. Afghanistan became a torn country that was set back 30 years agriculturally, educationally and economically, by destroying important irrigation systems, banning women from education, outlawing many luxuries. The Taliban regime continued to impede on Afghanistan's growth by encouraging opium production instead of important staple crops like wheat and fruit. Together, drought and opium production has caused food prices to sky rocket (CIA Fact Book, 2008). The high food costs and increasing unemployment has left many Afghans hungry and poor. Even with aid from the U.N. and other organizations, the Afghans are still faced with hunger (Afghanistan Conflict Minor, 2008).

A stop to this continuous cycle must be made. An extension program to instill farmers with knowledge and skill of their own would greatly improve Afghanistan's economy. In return, seminars to teach Afghans stronger farming practices and implementing new ideas with technology will in the long run benefit the country. Many years will be spent building on these ideas. Throughout the years, Afghanistan will continue to see an improvement in crop yields and availability of food. It certainly would be my dream, that at some point not too far in the future, that we have been successful in teaching

“men how to fish,” instead of giving them fish. Long term sustainability is only possible if we can help people reach their own potential to be farmers, and grow their own food supply. Relying on aid is important to get the country through its short term crisis, but may be soon seeing the day where Afghans can again be self sufficient in food production.

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