

INFORMAL BRAINSTORMING WORKSHOP ON
FOOD SECURITY IN AFGHANISTAN:
STRATEGIC ISSUES

Peshawar

22 November 2000

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

(Revised Draft)

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INTRODUCTION

This workshop was organized jointly by FAO, WFP, UNDP, the ASG, NGO representatives, and the World Bank. The main objectives of the workshop were to further develop a shared understanding of food security issues, integrate short- and longer-term approaches, prioritize appropriate instruments and policies, improve coordination, and move toward an operational strategy to guide specific assistance activities related to food security in the coming 1-2 years. As shown in the Agenda for the workshop (Annex 1), it included both plenary sessions, prepared presentations and, and small group discussions and reports.

The workshop brought together the different stakeholders among the Afghanistan assistance community involved in activities related to food security, with an emphasis on the field perspective and getting viewpoints from the main regions of the country (see Annex 2 for the list of participants). It aimed to build on an earlier food security strategy document prepared by FAO (summarized in annex 3) and ongoing work in the context of the Principled Common Programming (PCP) thematic group on Sustainable Livelihoods, the VAM process of WFP, and an ASG working group on food security.

SESSION 1: Food Security Situation and Issues

In his welcoming remarks, UN Co-ordinator for Afghanistan Erick de Mul appreciated the large turnout of more than 70 participants and remarked that this is probably the largest gathering ever collected to discuss the issue of food security in Afghanistan. This reflects the great importance and cross-cutting nature of this topic. He noted that the assistance community has access to relatively more statistics than in the past with respect to food security issues. In the context of this background information, there is a need to discuss the role of food aid and deliberate on longer-term interventions. He mentioned that discussion of water resource management is critical and that there is a need to keep in mind the context of the present drought. He also emphasized links with the serious problem of opium cultivation. With respect to the donors, Mr. de Mul argued that there is a need to move away from the present emergency mode and resulting piecemeal short-term interventions toward a longer-term perspective. Furthermore, he believed that greater certainty with respect to aid for Afghanistan, in the form of longer-term commitments, could lead to more efficient program implementation and better results in the field.

These opening remarks were followed by presentations on the following topics (see annexes 4-9):

1. Overview of the Food Security Situation and Strategy at the National Level *(Hans C Brink, FAO and Peter Sloane)*
2. Food Security in the Household context *(Christian B Hell, ACF)*

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| 3. Food Security in the Regional context | <i>(Michael Semple, UNRCO)</i> |
| 4. Role/Impact of Food Aid | <i>(Tom Hushek, US Embassy)</i> |
| 5. Livestock and Nomads/Kuchis | <i>(Olaf Thieme, FAO)</i> |
| 6. Water Resources Management | <i>(Salim Sattar, MADERA/DACAAR)</i> |
| 7. Impact of the Drought | <i>(Pippa Bradford, WFP)</i> |

SESSION 2: Small Group Discussions

The assembly then divided into five working groups. Four of the groups covered food security issues in specific regions, while the fifth focused on urban food security issues. Particular emphasis was given to getting the field perspective on regional food security issues and experience with aid delivery. The working groups were supposed to assess the food security needs of respective regions and come up with initial recommendations. Each group looked at short, medium and long term aspects, and issues of coordination also were discussed. Groups and their facilitators were:

1. East (Kabul and Jalalabad); Facilitator: Kerry J Wilson, DACAAR
2. South and West (Herat and Qandahar); Facilitator: Mark Pont, MCI
3. Hazarajat; Facilitator: Chris Johnson, SMU
4. Northeast (Mazar and Faizabad); Facilitator: Fiaz Shah, WFP
5. Urban Centers; Facilitator: Samantha Reynolds, UNCHS - Habitat

SESSION 3: Small Group Presentations

The groups presented their results in the first afternoon session, followed by a plenary discussion. The presentations of the working groups are summarized below:

GROUP I: East-Central (Kabul and Jalalabad)

By Afghanistan's standards this region is well favored agriculturally. With a milder climate and many rivers, the region suffers less from food security problems than many other areas. However, there are small areas in the upper valleys which are vulnerable.

1. Poppy issues

Opium is a prominent issue for the eastern region. It is the second largest poppy growing area in Afghanistan, accounting for 28% of total national opium

production. The imposition of the ban on poppy production will lead to hardships, including food shortages for individual households due to lack of other income. The international response to the poppy ban announced by Afghan authorities should consider providing:

- Credit to establish alternative livelihoods to compensate for loss of credit from poppy traders.
- Seed to help establish alternative cash crops.

6. Food production

As mentioned, this area is relatively food-secure, except for the villages in the mountain areas. Recommendations include:

- Increase cash crop production.
- Food processing and storage to add value to seasonal surpluses.
- Improving trade relations, particularly to allow the region to make use of its proximity to Pakistan.

7. Water Management

The region is relatively well served with water sources and distribution infrastructure. It is recommended to focus interventions on:

- The distribution of water and on-farm irrigation management through training of users and traditional community assemblies.
- Training on water distribution between upstream and downstream users.
- Rehabilitation of watersheds to reduce erosion, secure the recharge of aquifers, and improve the feeding of livestock.
- Develop small and medium sized irrigation systems to reach isolated farming communities.

8. Population

- The population has stabilized after years of a relatively calm situation without major fighting.
- Seasonal movements of population continue; these contribute to food security.

9. Landholdings

- Landholdings in the area are relatively evenly distributed.

10. Natural resources

- It is recommended to focus on range and forest management to avoid further losses of potential for food production.

- Rain water harvesting and tilling methods to better keep the moisture in cultivated soils should be expanded.
- An integrated approach is needed to secure improvements in food security, not just individual projects.

7. **Co-ordination**

- Generally good collaboration has been established between organizations and NGOs.
- It is necessary to capitalize on the present cooperation and strengthen it.

GROUP II: South-west (Herat and Qandahar)

This region is characterized by distinct features and is rather different from other parts of Afghanistan:

- Large-scale irrigation schemes in the plains around the main rivers.
- Kareze irrigation only in small tributary rivers.
- A low proportion of rainfed agriculture on the mountains above the plains.

Funding of projects

- The usual short-term financial commitments for projects are detrimental to long-term planning of sustainable interventions.
- Long-term commitments of donors are necessary to allow sustainable responses to development needs

Strategic elements

1. **Support to farming systems**

- Through its potential to generate surpluses, agriculture in the Southwest is the key factor for food security.
- Increase production and distribution improved seeds.
- Livestock improvement through better herds, health and rangeland management.

2. **Irrigation**

- Improvement of water supply systems and of on-farm water usage.
- Support to improvement of water management and maintenance of distribution systems.

3. **Other related factors**

- The off-farm economy needs micro-finance schemes to develop and help provide incomes for landless households.

- Infrastructure (roads, telephone, transports, markets, etc.) is in bad shape and needs improvement.
- The involvement of the private sector should be reinforced.
- In the social sectors, health services still lack a wide range of improvements. Furthermore, efforts need to be made in education, institutional training, water supply and sanitation.

Opium/poppy

- Poppy cultivation has a major influence on food security. Hence the ban on poppy needs a profitable, sustainable replacement in order to be successful.
- Opportunity costs need to be considered in assessing the impact of the ban and the incentives for growing poppy and other crops.

GROUP III: Hazarajat

Due to mountainous geography, livestock is of primary importance in the Hazarajat. Key features of the Hazarajat include:

- Agriculture relies in large part on rainfed, low-input production, while irrigated cultivation is limited to narrow valleys with limited surface area.
- There is a high proportion of landless farmers.
- Seasonal migration of labor to other provinces and countries is essential for many households because it provides secure incomes.
- Hazarajat differentiates itself from the general pattern of Afghanistan by the fact that livestock is more important there than cropping. Thus food security has suffered from the priority given at national level to agriculture by aid organisations.

Main characteristics of Hazarajat

- Low support to livestock production.
- Great needs of improving rangeland management.
- Erosion control is a major concern.
- Need for improved varieties of rainfed crops for high altitudes

Problems

- People are hungry.
- People have no incomes to buy food.

Lessons learned from the implementation of projects

- Free distribution of food does not encourage sustainable recovery of the local population.

- Some areas get too much support, while others equally in need are neglected.

Functioning of agencies

- Coordination is generally good, as well as understanding among agencies.
- The nature of project funding is a major difficulty -- too late, only short-term.
- Long-term planning and funding are necessary to tackle sustainable food security issues such as rangeland management, education, etc.

Strategies for Hazarajat

- Increased support to livestock production and related activities (sub-products)
- Efforts to reduce and control erosion linked to improvement of rangelands.
- Focus on low-cost technologies adapted to the poor own capital available in families.
- Develop production and distribution of improved varieties for rainfed cropping.

GROUP IV: Northeast (Mazar-e-Sharif and Badakshan)

In the absence of a representative from Mazar-e-Sharif, the group dealt only with food security issues in Badakshan.

Characteristics

- Scarce cropping land in the valleys with limited irrigated surface due to the topography.
- Poor access to improved varieties and agricultural inputs (seeds, fertilizers), leading to poor yields.
- Geographic isolation because of poor road infrastructure
- Poor quality of livestock with low production potential and poor breeding practices.
- Difficulties to store sufficient feed for livestock for the winter period.
- Lack of essential services to improve agriculture and livestock.
- Encroaching deforestation leading to higher erosion effects in a mountainous area.
- Limited sources of energy (wood, fuel); hydraulic potentials left unused.
- Due to poverty and insecurity, increasing urbanization with no creation of employment.

Food security

- Emphasis should be put on the improvement of livestock as a major source of livelihoods.

- Improvement of access to markets.
- New ideas should be developed, like developing fish ponds.
- Improvement of rainfed areas.
- Improvement of water management on the small-scale irrigation schemes and for rainfed cropping.
- Efforts in energy development are required (fuel wood).
- Need for a holistic approach to secure sustainable use of a fragile environment.

Problems

- Absence of a coordinated assistance policy. For example, the food for work approach can be jeopardized by one donor providing food for free.
- Alternative employment generation is still too weak. Key needs are:
 - (1) micro-credits for investment in food production and private sector, and
 - (2) vocational training to catch up with the lack of professional training facilities.

Strategies

- Holistic approach based on regional development plans.
- Coordinated funding by donors for coordinated implementation.
- Empowerment of communities to compensate for the absence of authorities based on indigenous working systems.
- Develop responsibility of beneficiaries to be considered as economic actors (ownership of own development activities).
- Creation of alternative employment through an adapted micro-credit policy and vocational training for the processing of local resources (wool, hides, fruits, etc.) to generate value added.

GROUP V: Urban Centers

The group identified certain stylized facts on the food security situation in urban areas.

Sources of food

- Labor in formal employment.
- Labor in informal/casual labor market.
- Business / trade.
- Subsistence / cash crops.
- Rural land from family providing extra food/income.
- Remittances and credit/mortgages.
- Cash crops in town gardens.

- Aid.
- Begging.

Problems

- Urban communities are weaker than their rural counterparts in terms of food security and traditional coping mechanisms.
- Government/State welfare services are unable to provide a suitable, timely response in emergencies.
- Markets are subject to monopoly manipulations.
- Price policies and other regulatory mechanisms are absent.
- There appears to be a responsibility/obligation gap between urban and rural areas.
- International trade, an important source of income, is inherently uncertain in nature.
- Government jobs with regular salaries are not available. Therefore income is generally not very stable.
- The ban on women working has further reduced income potentials.
- The worst situations are experienced in the urban centres of Herat and Mazar.

Recommendations

- Target the vulnerable.
- Increase food for work projects to secure food supply.
- Develop small business and trade opportunities for creation of jobs.
- Develop subsistence and cash crops/kitchen gardens in towns.
- Facilitate access to remittances.
- Introduce well-targeted cash for work programs for the most vulnerable.
- Focus on income generation rather than provision of food.
- Develop closer relations between rural production areas and consumer centers.
- Improve urban/rural linkages and coordination.
- Aid agencies need to continue action/analysis for a better adapted response.
- Each individual agency needs to develop a long-term focus.
- Over the longer term, consider low wage public employment programs with an employment guarantee.

Session 4: Toward an Operational Strategy

The concluding session of the workshop discussed what had been learned and how to move forward with respect to developing an operational strategy for the coming 1-2 years to enhance food security in Afghanistan on a sustainable basis.

Peter Sloane explained that certain prerequisites are necessary for successful agricultural interventions, and that these prerequisites are closely related to the level of intervention. In this context smaller, more localized activities, building on the skills of individual farmers and the cohesion of households and communities, have better prospects for success than larger-scale interventions that require involvement by regional or national authorities.

Erick de Mul commented that the emergency-related focus on life-saving interventions needs to be balanced by a more medium-term orientation toward sustainable enhancement of food security. He felt that this workshop was very beneficial in focussing attention on longer-term issues.

There was considerable discussion of the need for prioritization and for greater stability of funding. This highlighted the need for a cohesive, coordinated strategy that the different members of the assistance community – UN agencies, NGOs, and donors – could buy into. It was also argued that beneficiaries – i.e. the people of Afghanistan – should be involved in prioritization and feedback.

Another important theme which came out of the discussion was the need to develop regional strategies that take into account the distinctive characteristics, prospects, and food security needs of the different geographical regions and agro-ecological zones. The desirability of building on experience with successful programs also was highlighted, leading to a suggestion that agencies share their experience of demonstrated “success stories” that have emerged from their work in Afghanistan.

There was general agreement that the engagement and process initiated by this workshop should continue. The extensive participation of field-based personnel was considered to be a crucial ingredient in the success of the workshop.

It was agreed that general endorsement would be sought from the Afghanistan Support Group for a multi-year commitment to sustainable improvement of food security in Afghanistan, based on an agreed strategy. After the upcoming ASG meeting, follow-up interactions and possibly a second workshop would be organized. Follow-up workshops at the regional level also would be possible.

In his closing remarks, William Byrd (World Bank) thanked the presenters, group facilitators, and chairs of sessions for their very useful contributions, and more generally the participants for the many insights and productive discussions that occurred during the workshop. He also thanked the members of the working

team who had been involved in designing and organizing the workshop. The workshop should be seen as part of a continuing process, not as an end in itself. He announced that copies of the presentations as well as the proceedings of the workshop will be distributed to participants.