

***QAHT-E-POOL “A CASH FAMINE”***  
**FOOD INSECURITY IN AFGHANISTAN 1999 – 2002**

ACKU

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A copy of this report, English translations of the surveys and additional maps and charts can be found at the Feinstein International Famine Center web site ([www.famine.tufts.edu](http://www.famine.tufts.edu)) after June 15, 2002. Readers are encouraged to use this data for their own analytical purposes, provided that proper citation is noted for the Feinstein International Famine Center of Tufts University. Please share your research findings with the Center. For those without access to the web, please contact the Feinstein International Famine Center for a CD-ROM of the report, data, charts and tables.



## Executive Summary

1. This report seeks to explain why currently there is vulnerability to food insecurity in Afghanistan and how vulnerable individuals, households and communities are coping with food insecurity. Based on this analysis, recommendations for a principled strategy of humanitarian assistance are made to USAID.
2. This report covers field work in the north, central, southern and western regions of Afghanistan. Data were collected from focus group interviews in thirteen provinces.<sup>1</sup> Comprehensive work in the east was not possible due to instability (although surveyors did work in Nangahar Province). Key informant discussions were conducted with civil authorities, UN and NGO staff, military personnel (Afghan and international), donor government representatives and civilians (traders, shopkeepers, factory owners and workers, farmers, etc.) in fifteen provinces in Afghanistan.
3. Fieldwork was undertaken from January – May 2002. A draft report was released for comment in March 2002 and elicited many useful suggestions. This report is comprehensive and covers both the earlier report and the additional fieldwork undertaken after the release of the draft report.
4. Vulnerability to food insecurity is the outcome of the interaction between hazards and people's abilities to cope (or not) with them. Hazards fall into four categories in Afghanistan: economic risks, socio-political and geographic risks, natural and man-made hazards, and risks arising from problems with relief delivery.
5. More than two decades of war and political instability have rendered Afghanistan fundamentally vulnerable to food insecurity. Due to the protracted nature of the conflicts, the Afghan population developed coping strategies to mitigate these threats, including migration, employment diversification, submission to political oppression and taking up arms, for example. While the problems of survival were enormous for many people, most individuals, households and communities somehow lived through the many years of war.
6. Vulnerability to food insecurity increased sharply in recent years and remains very high throughout Afghanistan, despite massive humanitarian relief efforts, a change of regime and the presence of foreign military/peacekeeping forces. Three (and in some places, four) successive years of drought have overwhelmed the capacity of Afghan communities to cope with the loss of agriculture and livestock production, unemployment and burgeoning debt burdens. Unlike conflict-related threats, Afghan households are less adept at coping with drought; **among the over one thousand people interviewed in the focus groups, not a single individual could recall a similar drought in his/her life. The resulting**

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<sup>1</sup> Focus group interviews were conducted in 13 provinces: Kandahar, Helmand, Herat, Ghor, Farah, Wardak, Bamyan, Kabul, Nangahar, Kunduz, Balkh, Jowzjan and Sar-e-Pul. Key informant discussions were held in these provinces (except Nangahar) as well as Takhar, Baghlan and Faryab.

**chronic and transitory food insecurity in Afghanistan is widespread, deep, complex and life-threatening.**

7. The drought is not over. Although it has eased in the north and the west, the drought persists in the central and southern regions. The north and the west's relief from the drought is only temporary; the rivers that flow through these regions emanate from the Hindu Kush Mountains in the Hazarajat region of central Afghanistan where snowfall was minimal and the snow pack is estimated (informally) to be at a historical low. Irrigation and drinking water problems will return to the north and the west by this summer, while persisting at alarming levels elsewhere in Afghanistan until at least next spring.
8. **Recent political, military and humanitarian interventions in Afghanistan at times have made exciting and important contributions to alleviating food insecurity.** The authors wish to be very clear on this: **there are many instances where people would have died without humanitarian assistance, especially emergency water interventions and emergency food aid. The change of regime infused the Afghan economy with a confidence that sent food prices tumbling by 50% on average, an intervention that likely put more food on the Afghan table than all of the relief combined. Where the US military has been able to keep commander fighting to a minimum, the cost of transportation has fallen and the availability of goods on markets has increased.** The presence of ISAF in Kabul, while inadequate for meeting all of the city's policing needs, has been important for providing relative stability and safety in the capital.
9. **These are mixed blessings.** For reasons detailed in this report, international and domestic relief efforts have not eased adequately the suffering of the majority of Afghanistan's food insecure populations. The appreciation of the Afghani forced many shopkeepers out of business and was devastating to all who owed debts, i.e., most of the population. Continuing currency instability is limiting goods available on markets, especially in rural areas where transportation problems (due to roads that are badly in need of (re)construction) generate costly delays between wholesale purchases and retail sales. The air campaigns by the coalition forces generated displacement from certain urban areas (for those who could afford it) and stressed communities that hosted migrants fleeing war zones (especially in drought-stricken rural areas) as well as the urban poor who had no choice but to stay in the cities. The absence of robust peacekeeping forces throughout all of the major urban centers in Afghanistan continues to undermine efforts to unify the country.
10. The bulk of Afghanistan's vulnerable populations are still food insecure despite (or, in far fewer cases, because of) recent developments. Generous, sustained and strategic humanitarian and development assistance to Afghanistan is needed to save lives and restore livelihoods. USAID should be encouraged by its successes to date but humbled by the enormous challenges that remain. For some

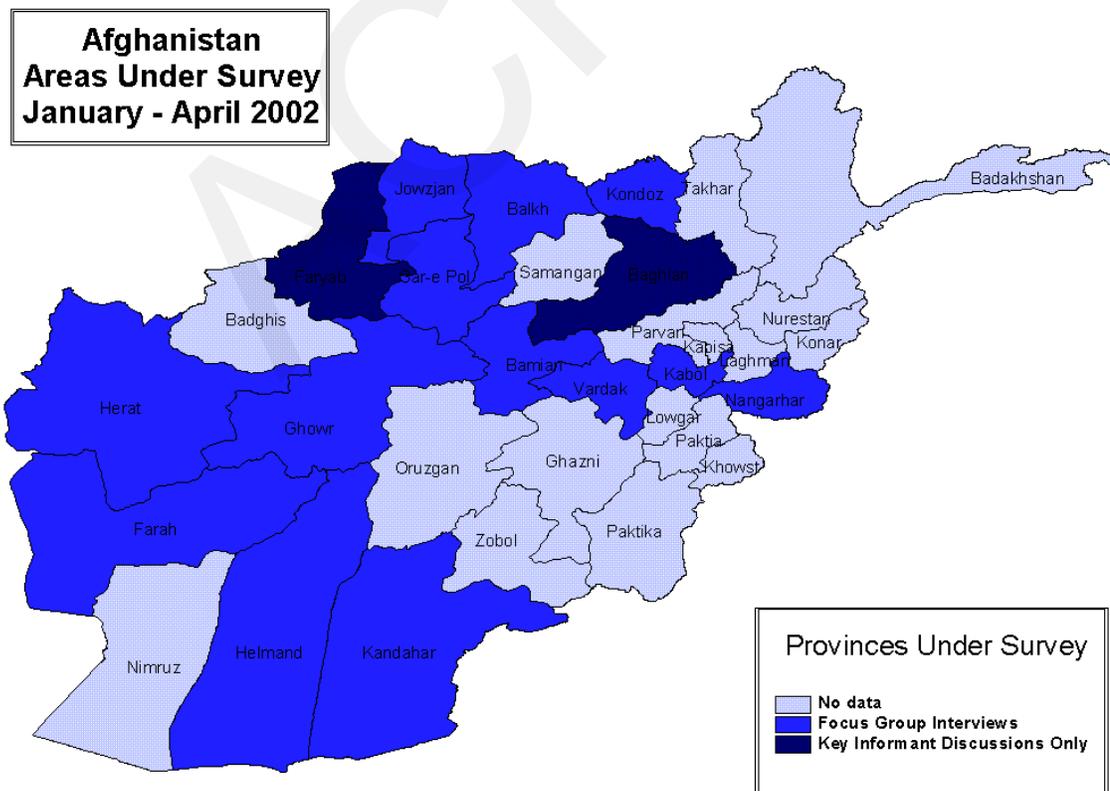
households, **there is a role for targeted, balanced and long-term programs of food assistance.** However, **the bulk of the vulnerable populations will find greater relief from food security through direct emergency and development interventions to create/restore primary and secondary road networks, expanded support for Cash-For-Work interventions, aggressive post-drought programs to restore livestock bases (from the family cow to the farmer's team of oxen to the pastoralists' herds); interventions to increase the quality and quantity of water available for household and agriculture use; health programs to address problems of infectious diseases, and post-drought programs to restore agriculture productivity and related employment in crops, orchards and vineyards. Fuel availability is critically low and poses an immediate threat to health and hygiene that will worsen sharply by next winter, while remaining a persistent problem limiting post-conflict and post-drought recovery options.**

11. The depth, breadth and nature of food insecurity in Afghanistan will continue to limit the effectiveness of humanitarian and development assistance programs. **Food security will only result when Afghans are able to grow, buy or rely on their kinship networks for their own food and water needs.** In order to achieve this, a deliberate and integrated strategy of political, economic and military interventions that are designed to move Afghanistan towards food security is essential. Food security for Afghanistan as a whole, however, does not appear to be the most pressing concern for many political and military actors currently engaged in Afghanistan at this time. For example, there is a lack of coherence among the military (focused on terrorism concerns), the political (focused on poppy eradication) and the humanitarian efforts (focused on food security).
12. Given current conditions in Afghanistan, large scale repatriation of Afghan refugees from neighboring countries appears premature and unsustainable. Returning refugees may not be adequately informed of the threats to food security facing them upon their return (e.g., drought, limited relief assistance) and may be basing their voluntary return options on poor or inadequate information. Rural – urban migration within Afghanistan is likely to increase in the coming months because this may be the only viable option for settled Afghan populations living in areas where drinking water sources, crop production and/or wage opportunities fail. There is an immediate need to plan and prepare for future increases in drought-related internal displacement from rural to urban areas, even as returning refugees continue to congregate in urban areas.

## Methodology

This report discusses the results of literature reviews, field visits, surveys and meetings in Afghanistan (Kabul, Nangahar, Helmand, Qandahar, Herat, Ghor, Farah, Bamiyan, Wardak, Balkh, Kunduz, Baghlan, Jowzjan, Sar-e-Pul, Takhar and Faryab.), Pakistan (Quetta, Islamabad, Peshawar) and the United States (Washington, DC) undertaken between January and May 2002. The work was funded by USAID and was facilitated under contract with the Save the Children – US and the Feinstein International Famine Center of Tufts University. UNICEF, Mercy Corps International (MCI) and the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (CHA) provided additional logistical support.

The work covered the north, central, south and western parts of the country. Insecurity precluded substantive work in the eastern areas. Focus group surveys were conducted in thirteen provinces by teams of surveyors (usually 1 man and 1 woman each) who used a semi-structured interview format to explore coping strategies over the past three years (March – March, according to the Afghan calendar). Over 1100 people were interviewed in semi-structured focus groups. Interviewers were engineers, teachers, retired military personnel and other similarly educated Afghan nationals. Most did not speak English. Interviewer training, focus groups and focus group reporting were in Dari and Pushto. Coping strategies were organized by category (Diet, Asset Depletion, Migration, etc.) and trends in coping strategies were estimated.



The studies were intended to be descriptive in order to capture the range of coping across society. Purposive and convenience sampling was used. The results of this study should not be extrapolated to larger populations, e.g. other areas not visited by the study teams. Interviewers found friends, colleagues or strangers in each district and asked them to organize small (usually 2 – 4) groups of men, women, youth and shopkeepers from wealthy, middle class and poor backgrounds. Interviewers stressed that they were not from a humanitarian organization and that there would be no assistance provided in connection with the interviews, i.e., that they did not necessarily wish to speak to the most vulnerable. The survey results presented here describe the survey population only. We have assumed that the challenges facing this population are typical of those facing many in Afghanistan.

In every area visited (except Nangahar), the team conducted detailed interviews with traders and shopkeepers in markets (livestock, cereals, household goods). Further interviews with government, UN, NGO and military personnel were also completed. Surveys were not conducted in Baghlan, Takhar or Faryab, but the team conducted key informant interviews in Baghlan and Takhar and participated in a WFP Rapid Emergency Food Needs Assessment mission (REFNA) in Faryab. Literature reviews were undertaken at Tufts University and at the Afghan Resource and Information Center (ARIC) in Peshawar, Pakistan.

## The Context of Risk and Vulnerability to Food Insecurity

This report was commissioned by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in order to provide a better understanding of food insecurity in Afghanistan, to further knowledge about Afghan-specific coping strategies, and to offer guidance to improve the US strategy of assistance. Specifically, the team examined three questions:

1. Is there food insecurity in Afghanistan and, if so, why?
2. How are individuals, households and communities dealing with food insecurity?
3. What (more) can USAID do to address problems of food insecurity?

Food security is defined as the condition whereby everyone, at all times, has access to and control over sufficient quantities of good quality food necessary for an active and healthy life (World Bank 1986). It is composed of three elements: a) **access** to food, b) **availability** of food (emphasizing the importance of *consistency* of access and control, “at all times”) and c) and **good health**. Access to food is realized through “exchange entitlements” that include purchases, barter transactions and support through kinship, government or relief channels (Sen 1981), as well as issues pertaining to inter- and intra-household distribution of food. Availability pertains to both the quality and quantity of food supply from production, commercial networks and aid channels.

In the areas under consideration, risks and vulnerabilities that threaten food security in Afghanistan can be categorized as:

1. Economic vulnerability
2. Socio-political vulnerability
3. Hazards
4. Humanitarian inadequacies

### ***Economic Risk and Vulnerability***

Afghanistan is currently experiencing a third or, in some places, a fourth year of severe drought. Drought-related losses of income have accelerated war-related vulnerabilities to poverty while also increasing the demand for cash at the household level. The result is a paradox of purchasing power: *more people need to access markets to achieve food security than ever before yet fewer people have the cash resources necessary to buy goods on the market.*

Since the fall of the Taliban, the national currency, the Afghani, has strengthened markedly. While the appreciation of the Afghani has been matched by equal declines in the nominal price of food items on markets throughout Afghanistan, falling food prices have not adequately off-set deeper economic vulnerabilities. The institutions of credit are stressed and failing. Instability in the currency markets has led to widespread de-

capitalization, particularly among the trading classes, and a deepening of household debt burdens. The combination of bad debts and currency-related capital losses has created an unusual class of vulnerable citizens: shopkeepers. Protracted conflict has further weakened Afghanistan's marketing infrastructure (transportation, communication, finance, actors, physical markets, etc.) Exploited men, women and children in the work force have few viable labor alternatives because of high prevailing rates of under- and unemployment and their own fairly desperate needs for wage income.

Vulnerability to food insecurity is directly linked to Afghanistan's various sub-economies. Historical legacy has defined three distinct economies:

- 1) An economy of violent war and illegitimate trade of narcotics, weapons and legitimate commodities;
- 2) An artificial economy of external assistance that is highly variable and unpredictable;
- 3) A struggling economy of legitimate (if often exploitative) enterprises that includes agriculture, livestock production, and small-scale enterprise (such as carpet weaving).

The parameters of these often competing economies define the options of supply and demand available to households. These economies also govern the ability of households to use institutions that help manage risk over time (especially credit), and to build resilience against shocks (such as drought, attacks or unemployment) through the accumulation of wealth or surpluses.

Throughout Afghanistan, there are crises of purchasing power, production and credit that continue to directly threaten household food security. Drought-induced agriculture and livestock production losses are responsible for sharp declines in farm income. The resulting "cash famine" coincides with increasing reliance by both rural and urban households on the market for food products, water and fuel. In pre-drought years, these commodities were supplied through self-sufficient production from farms, livestock, orchards and kitchen gardens.

The drought and recent change of administration have introduced new forms of economic risk and related vulnerabilities in addition to those generated by more than two decades of conflict. Those who were previously self-sufficient, such as farmers and pastoralist Koochi herders, have been particularly hard hit by the shift from production to exchange entitlements. Likewise, Afghan traders are unable to export used household goods because of the closure of the Turkham border in Pakistan. This has depressed prices, lowering the returns to families engaging in distress sales of household assets. Other small industries and enterprises that have been negatively affected by the drought, war and a historical lack of development investment include textiles and carpet weaving, mulberry, cotton, silk and cinnamon oil production, as well as coal mining, livestock herding, and horticulture.

As in all protracted complex emergencies, there are those that have retained or increased their wealth while others have fallen deeply into poverty. Again, as is typical, the losers (i.e., those not secure) currently outnumber the winners in Afghanistan by more than 6:1, according to the survey results. In the analysis of the survey results, a minority of respondents (ranging from 9% - 15%) can be classified currently as secure with respect to debt, diet, assets and/or agriculture water availability. This should be compared to the 41% - 59% of the survey population that was secure two years ago, in the first year of the drought. Over the past two years, the numbers of respondents who can be classified as secure with respect to diet, debt, asset bases and water have fallen between 65% and 85%, as Table I indicates. The sharpest rates of decline in household security occurred after the first year of the drought. The current relief efforts commenced well after the majority of respondents had been forced by circumstance to tap into their survival strategies, reducing food intake, selling of key assets and going deeply into debt.

**TABLE I. LOSS OF SECURITY AMONG SURVEY RESPONDENTS IN 13 AFGHAN PROVINCES, MARCH 1999 – MARCH 2002<sup>2</sup>**

Category	% of Respondents Secure 1999/2000	% of Respondents Secure 2000/2001	% of Respondents Secure 2001/2002	Percent Change (1999/2000 to 2001/ 2002)‡
Debt	56%	21%	14%	<b>75% Decrease</b>
Diet	59%	17%	9%	<b>85% Decrease</b>
Assets	41%	13%	13%	<b>70% Decrease</b>
Water Resources*	43%	14%	15%	<b>65% Decrease</b>

‡ Errors due to rounding

\*Water available for agriculture. Excludes Kabul.

David Keen has observed, “Even thieves need a place to sell their stolen goods.” Not all who are doing well in Afghanistan have done so legitimately. Afghanistan’s wealthy but militarized elite has long-standing and close ties to domestic and international market networks. Over time, the urban markets of the south, north and the west and the regionalized transportation infrastructures have become oriented towards the management of substantial foreign currency flows (e.g. currency traders in Qandahar recalled the days when inflows of US Dollars would arrive still in their US Treasury wrappings), and the import and export of weapons, food, household and luxury goods, narcotics, timber, people and minerals. The war economy has been fueled further by looting.

<sup>2</sup> While Table XXX shows a steep decline over the past three years, the largest jump occurred between 1999/2000 and 2000/2001. For example, the numbers of secure households fell by between 60% and 70% with respect to diet, debt, asset and water security between the first and second year of the drought. It is also important to remember that the latest change in the political regime occurred halfway through the third Afghan year (March to March) in the table, and the results therefore do not clearly illustrate the more recent positive (or negative) changes in security.

## A Debt Disaster: Debt Burdens, Low Availability and Costs of Credit

The period of political transition has deepened the economic crisis facing many in Afghanistan, exacerbating vulnerabilities borne out of drought-related production failures and protracted conflict. Deepening poverty has led to high overall debt burdens, widespread delinquency on loan payments and outright default. Farmers are routinely indebted, having been caught in a cycle of short term consumption and production loans that could not be repaid because of successive failed harvests. New classes within Afghan society have incurred debts that they are unable to repay, including shopkeepers and civil servants.

The post-Taliban appreciation of the Afghani currency and associated price declines were helpful in depressing commodity prices but were devastating for anyone who held debt in terms of Afghani. Unfortunately, this included most of the populations in the study areas. This was notably hard on shopkeepers who held their stocks on short-term credits and for people who had, in order to cope with the drought, borrowed money against their lands, houses, orchards, water rights, etc. (See Box 1 “*Gerawei*” below.) While representing a windfall in real terms to moneylenders, borrowers saw the cost of their debts double as prices (and hence incomes) in nominal terms fell by at least half. For example, a shopkeeper who was in debt for 5 million Afghanis now has to work harder to repay his debt. His profit margin is denominated in fewer Afghanis because prices have fallen, while his debt has remained constant.<sup>3</sup>

### Box 1: *Gerawei*

In order to obtain cash in Afghanistan, individuals can exchange access to productive assets or shelter in return for a “once-off” sum of money, termed “*gerawei*”. The lender uses the asset until the debtor repays the sum of money in full (but usually without interest). Title remains with the debtor. Individuals unable to repay the money can be forced to sell the asset in order to clear the debt but this appears to be fairly rare. In most cases, people put their assets in *gerawei* two or three years ago and have not been able to raise enough money to repay the original sum. For borrowers and lenders alike, this has been a lose-lose arrangement. Many lenders financed *gerawei* on the assumption that they could use the assets—such as land—for production, making the loan profitable. Hazards, especially drought, rendered many of these assets production-less in recent years. Others financed *gerawei* out of humanitarian motivations as a face-saving way of assisting distressed neighbors. Interventions are needed (e.g. formal micro-credit through private sector agriculture input supplier networks) in order to re-finance these loans so that individuals can regain in honorable fashion access to their farmland, orchards, houses and water rights.

<sup>3</sup> For (non-Afghan) readers having trouble with this concept, imagine this: you have a household mortgage worth \$175,000 but suddenly the dollar appreciates and prices fall by half. Based on this, your employer decides to cut your salary from \$75,000/year to \$37,500/year. While you can still buy the same amount of food at the market because prices have fallen by 50%, your mortgage appears to you to be twice as difficult to pay off because of your new income.

In good times and bad, households in Afghanistan are strongly debt-averse due to traditional and religious beliefs, and take loans of any sizeable amount only after selling household and productive assets. In the absence of a formal banking system, access to credit throughout Afghanistan is limited to informal institutions defined by notions of kinship and community. Historically, loans were short term (e.g. extended until harvest), interest free (in keeping with Islamic beliefs) and taken by men from male relatives and neighbors. Debts are usually taken in the form of cash, food, water or fuel. Men turn first to their horizontal kinship networks (brothers, male cousins, brothers-in-law) and to older generations (fathers, uncles). As financial stress deepens in the household, credit is extended from younger generations to the older generation, where possible, e.g. fathers seeking loans from sons-in-law. This can be embarrassing for the older male. Women and, in rare instances, children also engaged in kinship-related debt relations.

*I am still in debt and this bothers me a lot, especially when I see my relatives.*

Woman  
Andarah District, Farah

Families seek and extend credit until kinship networks are depleted. Debtors have been unable to repay their debts because of drought-related losses of income and production, thus impoverishing extended families. Once kinship networks are exhausted, men seek credit from

shopkeepers and other businessmen.

The current widespread use of credit to deal with food insecurity is, in itself, a sign of distress at the household level. Over the past three years, informal mechanisms of credit have increasingly failed due to stress and interest rates have increased. Overall debt burdens are high. The consequences of the debt crises are profound and disturbing. Many families have mortgaged (*gerawei*) their lands, orchards, vineyards, water rights and houses. Others have been forced to allow their (often very young) daughters to marry moneylenders.

Interest is specifically prohibited in the Koran but is an economic necessity given the increasing problems with delinquency and default. Some focus group participants whispered to the surveyors that a person had “died with his debt,” reflecting the social burden that inherited debt places on surviving male relatives who must repay the debt in order to protect the deceased from his creditors who are believed to pursue him in the afterlife.

*We borrowed more and more, and people were lending with interest. For instance, one seer (7 kg) of wheat flour was 150,000 Afghanis, and we had to pay 300,000 Afghanis when we paid it back. A loan of 60 seer of wheat for a three-month term would cost 90 seer to repay.*

Tajik and Pashtun men  
Chanabad District, Kunduz

Drought, war and political changes have increased risks over time, with predictable but damaging implications for both the availability and cost of credit. Mounting debt burdens at the household and shopkeeper level not only limit access to new credit but also serve as a crippling source of shame. In many interviews, men reported being unable to leave their household compounds for fear of encountering their moneylenders. In one focus group interview in Qandahar, a military man said, “I have more debt than hairs on my head. Anyone I see, I think that is someone to whom I owe money. I can’t face anyone anymore.” Others, especially widows, Internally Displaced Persons, ethnic

minorities living among other ethnic majorities and deeply impoverished families complained that no one would lend them money any more. A group of boys in Kabul told their surveyor:

*Most of the fathers in the neighborhood are in debt and are too ashamed to go to the stores so they force us to go and borrow. It makes us feel as though we are in the middle of the shopkeepers and our fathers. This makes us embarrassed in front of our friends. Being in debt has caused a lot of problem for families – it is just destroying them.*

In Afghanistan, there are several types of credit, including:

- *Qarz-e-Hasana*: interest-free loan that has high moral rewards in Islam.
- *Qarz-e-Soud*: loan with interest that is mainly practiced in secrecy, as this type of loan is forbidden in Islam. A SC-US report in Kohistan district of Faryab shows that 23% of the household used loans with 14% interest (Payne 2002). In the survey areas for this report, interest rates as high as 100% were reported.

In the focus group interviews, debts that threatened food security were incurred in order to purchase food, to finance migration (usually to pay smuggler's fees, especially to Iran), to pay for medical and funeral costs, and (among a small minority) to support the cost of drug addiction (hashish). In addition, households, farmers and businessmen incurred productive debts, including debts to finance the purchase of seed and fertilizer for this year's winter wheat crop (especially in the north where spring rains were promising).

### **Box 2: Credit and Complex Emergencies**

In most societies, credit, like insurance, is an important economic mechanism for managing risk over time. Access to credit smoothes inter-temporal fluctuations in household income. Healthy institutions of credit can also strengthen communities, increase production and generate wealth. In times of disaster, access to credit can be a blessing and a curse for lenders and debtors alike. Interest rates reflect, in part, the cost of the risk to the lender of extending credit. Complex emergencies grossly inflate the risk to lenders, and credit during disasters is predictably expensive. Formal and informal institutions of credit rely on social/legal mechanisms for the enforcement of repayment. Such institutions, too, are often stressed in times of disasters.

The availability of credit has decreased and interest rates (at times quite high) are being applied with increasing frequency. For the households in the surveys who were unable to obtain credit, the primary cause was a lack of money available for lending within extended family or neighborhood networks. Shopkeepers in the north and central regions of Afghanistan, for example, routinely charge 100% interest on goods bought on credit. Internally Displaced Populations (IDPs) and Pashtun pastoralist (Koochi) populations are charged higher interest rates than settled populations as a result of both the particular risk to lenders and outright discrimination.

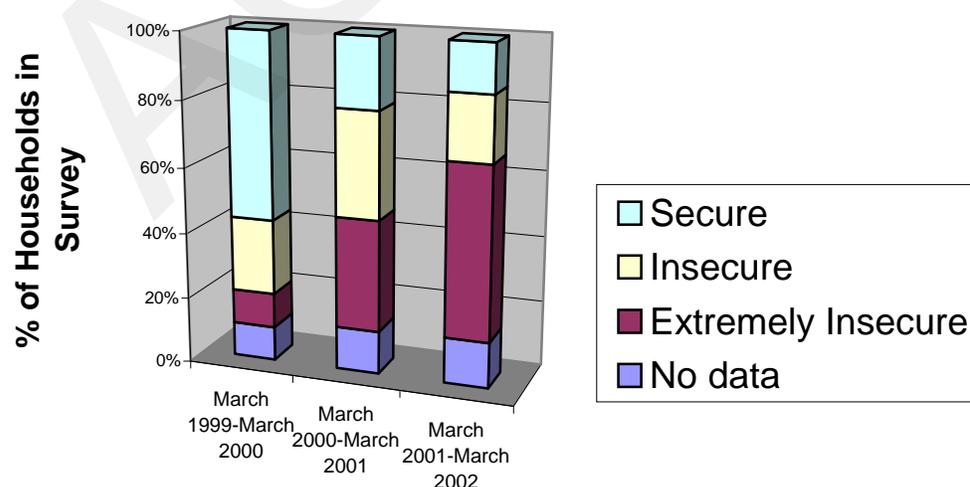
Reflecting both the economic and social stresses generated by debt burdens, the research team classified households in the survey as Secure, Insecure and Extremely Insecure, according to the definitions described in Table II.

**TABLE II. CLASSIFICATIONS OF DEBT SECURITY**

<b>Extremely insecure</b>	<b>Insecure</b>	<b>Secure</b>
Debt is a source of shame and/or deep anxiety (men unable to leave house, people who don't know how they can repay debt); people unwilling to lend to individual/household; daughters given to money lenders in marriage because debt can't be paid, borrowed money for business and then business failed, large debts with employers or shopkeepers, any debt with interest, debt of more than 20 lak (1 lak = 100,000 Afghanis) for illness or funeral, in debt with family more than 20 lak (1 lak = 100,000 Afghanis), shopkeepers going into debt to keep store going, inherited debt	Debt threatens land or house, large debts incurred in order to purchase food or to finance migration; widows in debt, interest free debts, debts resulting from advances against harvests (if harvest failed), Shopkeepers who aren't being paid by customers, debt to build house, debt to drill wells, selling of assets to repay debts, borrowing seeds, borrowed from family/neighbors up to 20 lak (1 lak = 100,000 Afghanis)	No threat of debt/debts manageable, e.g. short term, repaid on time, able to repay debts after harvest

Based on these classifications, the data were analyzed for trends in debt security. As Chart I indicates, the percentage of debt secure households in the survey dramatically decreased between the first and second years of the drought while households vulnerable to both insecurity and extreme insecurity increased. Approximately 80% of the households in the survey are facing serious levels of debt insecurity, including over 60% of the households that are classified as extremely insecure.

**CHART I. CHANGES IN DEBT SECURITY**



These trends of deepening debt insecurity are indicative of overall levels of food insecurity. In addition, the increasing numbers of households that have fallen deeply into debt suggests that vulnerable families are losing their lands and other productive assets, problems that will lead to long term (chronic) food insecurity.

## Monetary Instability: Winners, Losers and Continued Uncertainty

The change in administration last year was accompanied by a dramatic appreciation of the Afghani currency (AFA) but the appreciation has not been stable, as Table III indicates. The post-Taliban appreciation of the Afghani was fueled by widespread optimism that the change of administration would be accompanied a relaxation of Afghanistan's international political and economic isolation, as well as by expectations of generous programs of relief and development assistance. In large part, these expectations were fueled by the media. Multiple currencies and uncontrolled releases of sizeable currency flows to the market continue to thwart attempts to formally stabilize the Afghani, while currency markets remain highly sensitive to rumor. For example, currency traders interviewed for this report indicated that they closely analyzed the hourly BBC news broadcasts for indications of any developments that might influence the value of the Afghani, and they buy and sell accordingly.

**TABLE III: AFGHANI - US DOLLAR EXCHANGE RATE FLUCTUATIONS, 1996 – 2001**

Exchange Rate Afghani (AFA): 1 USD	Date
4,750 AFA: 1 USD	December 24, 2001
14,000 AFA: 1 USD	December 22, 2001
36,500 AFA: 1 USD	December 1, 2001
80,000 AFA: 1 USD	September 11, 2001
3,000 AFA: 1 USD	April 1996
51 AFA: 1 USD	Pre-April 1996
120 AFA: 1 USD	1989

Source: <http://www.bankintroductions.com/afghan.html>

The appreciation fueled deflation of commodity prices. This was good for consumers who had cash savings of Afghanis, as purchasing power nearly doubled. Those who had taken loans in hard currency (such as Pakistani rupees or Iranian rials) also benefited. Traders who purchase in foreign currency but sell in Afghanis also came out ahead. The majority of the population, however, had neither domestic savings nor dealings in hard currency but rather fundamentally lacked purchasing power to capitalize on the price declines.

*“Due to the lack of transportation, the cost of transportation has increased and this increases the cost of our stock. Because of uncertainty in the exchange rate, we are reluctant to make new purchases.*

*Shopkeepers  
Kabul*

While falling prices may be helpful to some populations, the continued monetary instability that has characterized post-Taliban Afghanistan threatens household food security generally. The unstable currency increases the risk to traders and shopkeepers engaged in transactions valued in Afghanis, especially for those who must buy in bulk (e.g. for transport to distant markets) and for those who purchase their goods on terms of credit valued in Afghanis. By and large, those who are suffering from currency instability are the economic actors that dominate the lower echelons of the retailing chain, especially local

shopkeepers. Combined with the failure of their customers to repay (ever-increasing) debts, the village shopkeepers can be considered one of the most vulnerable classes in Afghan society. This is unusual in complex emergencies; relief workers assume shopkeepers to be among the wealthy. Acting on this assumption, WFP in Afghanistan routinely excludes shopkeepers from relief distributions. A group of shopkeepers from Shahrak District, Ghor Province reflected on their changing fortunes:

*The transportation is much better. It is now only 2,000 Afghani to bring goods from Herat to our village. But there is no movement of goods in the market, and our business is poor. The wool industry is dead, and I believe that many of us, in Herat and here, will soon be bankrupt. We do not have very many customers here because people do not have cash to buy. We get hurt and have a very hard time but we are not eligible to receive aid. We are labeled as “shopkeepers,” but we are poor.*

Prices have fallen because of exchange rate fluctuations. It simply requires fewer Afghanis to purchase imported goods, and the price of imported goods has fallen in terms of local currency. Prices are also falling for some key domestic goods as well, especially for those goods that are near perfect substitutes for imported items, such as Afghan wheat and Pakistani wheat.<sup>4</sup> Of concern, maize appears to be resistant to the trend in falling prices. In many areas visited, the price of maize was increasing and was approaching price parity with wheat. Maize in Afghanistan is used for animal fodder and is a highly inferior good for human consumption, i.e., only the very poorest of the poor consume maize. Relative increases in the price of maize are indicative of both drought-related domestic production declines and increasing demand for maize for human consumption as a result of extreme poverty and weak purchasing power. In addition, maize is used for animal fodder. Because the pastures are extremely drought-affected, livestock owners are also buying maize to keep livestock alive.<sup>5</sup>

*Thank God for the political change that caused the prices to drop. But we still didn't have money!*

*Shopkeeper  
Dehdadie District, Balkh*

Overall, it is encouraging that Afghan markets, especially in urban areas, are highly sensitive to these economic trends and are kept somewhat in balance by highly integrated nationwide networks of commercial actors who are in regular communication with each other. For example, major currency traders in Qandahar speak with currency traders in other markets in Afghanistan and in the neighboring countries by satellite phone at least three times each day. While there are obvious profits being made (and lost!) on currency speculation and trading on currency margins, these are important mechanisms for providing a modicum of stability in the Afghan currency and should not be discouraged.

<sup>4</sup> The collapse of agricultural production in Afghanistan has resulted in a shortage of domestic wheat on the market. Consumers prefer the Afghan variety over imported grain.

<sup>5</sup> This situation suggests an interesting intervention. Monetization of maize in Afghanistan is needed in order to depress prices and increase availability and accessibility. This would have the dual benefit of benefiting highly vulnerable populations, especially those beyond the reach of humanitarian organizations, as well as helping to support remaining (and threatened) livestock herds. Nutrition supplementation of monetized maize is possible desirable.

The activities of currency traders help to rationalize the foreign exchange rates in a country that lacks a formalized banking system. The nationwide flow of currency between markets has been hindered in recent months by the loss of the domestic air transportation network linking currency traders in provincial capitals. Currency must now be physically transported overland by trucks, a slower and less secure process.

### **Weak Purchasing Power: Unemployment and Loss of Income**

Purchasing power is falling in the areas under review in part because wages are falling faster than prices. Wages are falling because of the increased numbers of job seekers, including farmers who have realized that their winter crops would fail, women who are returning to the workplace after restrictions imposed by the Taliban were lifted, and children who are increasingly being relied upon to contribute – at times substantially – to household income. In addition, many refugees returning from neighboring countries are seeking jobs in urban areas rather than traveling directly to homes in rural areas.

Wages also are falling because of the loss of jobs due to the continued effects of the drought and because of some losses of wealth associated with the change of administration. Under the Taliban, for example, there were limited opportunities in the construction and transportation sectors because the Taliban demanded these types of services and had the means to pay for it. The departure of a wealthy class of largely Arab nationals has dampened these sectors (as well as weakened the financial underpinnings of systems of Islamic charity, such as *zakat*) while new investment in construction due to the combined demands of the humanitarian, development, business and media communities still lags behind expectations.

De-capitalization among the trading classes as well as bankruptcy has been a problem over the past several months. For example, of sixty domestic grain traders operating in Qandahar last summer, only four have survived the economic changes associated with the change of administration. In Shirbirghan, Jowzjan Province more than two-thirds of stalls in the market have closed since last fall. Traders blame a collapse of prices due to food aid. In addition, the bankruptcies were likely due to the combined result of ethnic tensions (many of the merchants who left were Pashtun), currency losses and debt burdens.

Many civil servants lost their jobs under the Taliban (e.g. women, university professors, skilled technicians, members of the militias). Those that retained employment were not often regularly paid. The interim government has been unable to pay civil servant salaries, and this has contributed to food insecurity among Afghanistan's traditional middle classes. As of late April, civil servants in most of the provinces visited had yet to be paid, despite expectations raised by the international community's pledges of support to the United Nations. Like many others, civil servants are trying to augment their income with wage labor and have increased reliance on their children to provide income and food for the household. A group of civil servants in Kabul explained that

*We used to eat more vegetables in the summer but we haven't been paid for six or seven months. We bought some carrying trays for our boys (for selling cigarettes). The boys' income provides most of the support for our families. We do not go to the market because we can only afford to buy small quantities. We do not eat meat for weeks on end. Because we do not eat meat, we are weak – especially our kids because they don't get enough protein.*

### **Production Failure: Drought, Distress Sale of Assets and (For Some) Poppy**

The worst drought in living memory has led to widespread collapse in both subsistence and commercial food production of crops and livestock. In order to cope with the production related losses of income, households have engaged in distress sales of productive assets that, in turn, lead to further losses of opportunities for productive enterprise. In the survey, households reported selling land, livestock, carpet looms, sewing machines, water pumps, cars, donkeys and mills, for example.

*The water table went down and we did not have enough water for our irrigated land or our livestock. The drought had a very serious impact on our ability to farm or to conduct any economic activities. People sold their livestock, and we fell on hard times.*

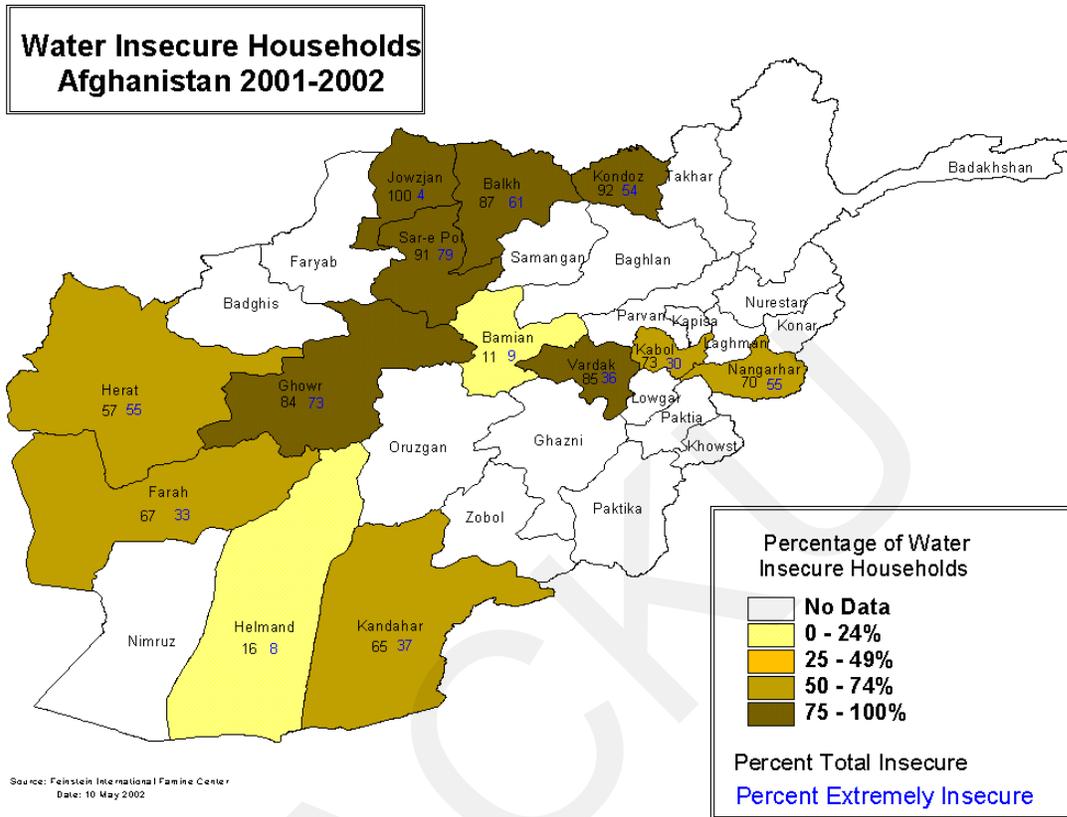
*Men  
Shulgarah, Balkh Province*

Drought-related water stress led first to reduced harvests and then forced farmers to leave their land fallow due to lack of returns from production. For example, one typical farmer from Saigan, Bamyan province told the surveyors about his lack of production over the past three years of drought. Each year, he planted on average about 350 kilograms of seed. In the first year of the drought, the harvest totally failed. Last year and the year before, his harvests of 35 – 43 kilograms of wheat were inadequate to offset his investment in seeds, much less provide any food for his family. Livestock losses have been profound for both the pastoralist Koochi and for the farming populations who have lost access to their sources of animal traction (oxen) as well as the family supplier of milk (cows, goats).

Despite heroic attempts to save orchards, including digging wells and watering orchards by hand, fruit trees – some as old as 35 years – have died throughout Afghanistan. This has been especially pronounced over the past two years. In an interview with young girls in the Saiedabad District of Wardak, the girls explained that they had watered their orchards by hand for two years, only to have the trees die in the third year of the drought. While wood from fruit trees has proven to be an important source of household fuel as well as income, the loss of the orchards represents a serious threat to household food security. The orchards provided an important source of vitamins in the household diet, and the loss of fruit increases vulnerability to micronutrient deficiencies. The sale of fruit was also an important source of income for those able to access markets. Nutritional vulnerability has been compounded by a loss of access to vegetables. Kitchen gardens, once ubiquitous throughout Afghanistan, largely have been abandoned because of the drought.

Although spring rains have brought temporary relief to the north and the west, serious drought and water problems persist in Afghanistan, as Map I below indicates.

**MAP I. WATER INSECURE HOUSEHOLDS AFGHANISTAN 2001 - 2002**



There are trade-offs between household water and household food security strategies. Urban and rural gardens and orchards for household vegetable and fruit production have

*In the whole area, there was only one spring and had to stay in line for more than half day. We could not wash our clothes very often. On those days that we could not get water we went to our neighbors and borrowed only a cup of water to avoid dying from thirst. My father got sick from carrying water over such far distances and he is now too ill to continue this.  
16 year-old female  
a recent arrival at the Maslakh camp, Herat*

died because of two to three years of drought, forcing reliance on the market for diversity in the diet that few can afford. Household water availability has decreased markedly over the past year, with serious consequences for health and hygiene, in addition to having negative social ramifications (e.g. people are not able to perform ablutions prior to praying as prescribed in the Koran). Declining water availability has also increased prices charged by bathhouses in urban areas, e.g. in Kabul and Herat most of the families in the study could no longer afford to use the bathhouses (which were also off-limits to women during the Taliban). The frequency of bathing and

clothes washing has fallen to 1 – 2 times per month for the many in the study. Children (including very young children) in some areas spend all day fetching water from distant

sources. The deepening drought has led to sharp increases in the saline content of water sources

It is against this context of severe economic and water stress at the household level that some farmers have turned to poppy production. Due to the continuing drought and poor marketing infrastructure, poppy remains a highly attractive alternative to destitution and starvation for some farmers. Poor roads, in particular, limit farmers' opportunities to market profitably their non-poppy produce. In contrast, poppy is drought resistant and travels well across difficult terrain.

Poppy eradication remains a central focus of many international actors engaged in Afghanistan, especially the US and Europe. Efforts to eradicate poppy include positive incentives such as cash-for-work programs that will contribute to increased food security. Other eradication efforts threaten food security, including recent efforts to crack-down on poppy production that have blocked roads in the south and the east, led to increased violence and instability, prevented the return of refugees, and increased political resistance to the Afghan Interim Authority.

Of interest, the survey teams found no evidence that poppy smugglers have extended credit to growers. Local authorities posited that this was because the Taliban had been financing the credit schemes. There is no evidence that the trans-global narcotics smugglers have been de-capitalized as a result of the change of administration, however. The lack of credit is likely to be a reflection of:

- Concern that the crop will be destroyed;
- A desire on the part of smugglers to keep supplies limited in order to drive up the price of poppy;
- Uncertainty among poppy smugglers about what political/economic options are available/will be available in an administration that has such ties to the USG; and,
- Limited demand for credit because growers fear reprisals if they are unable to repay their debts.

Lack of credit notwithstanding, poppy in southern Afghanistan is cultivated by three types of farmers:

1. The wealthy who have preferential access to water and are seeking to increase their wealth;
2. Strategic farmers who are hoping to attract international aid with their poppy crops. These farmers plant close to well-traveled roads, for example, and have committed only a portion of their land to poppy; and,
3. Desperately poor farmers who have just enough land and water for poppy but not enough resources to plant traditional or alternative crops. These farmers are described as being so poor as to "not even afford a cup of tea". For these farmers especially, the cultivation of poppy is moral anguish as they regard its cultivation to be highly un-Islamic.

Of note, authorities were not concerned with the question of *hashish* production, consumption, or other problems of *hashish* addiction. The studies from Kabul indicated that there is a growing market for *hashish*.<sup>6</sup> Drug abuse is a cause of household debt for those few households with addicts, and can be devastating for households struggling to maintain basic food security.

*One of my sons is not in school. He smokes hashish. This is very shameful to admit. He is now an addict. Everyone in the family is troubled by this.*

*Woman, 11<sup>th</sup> District, Kabul*

### **Transportation and Markets: Potholes, Landmines and Isolation**

The nation's poor transportation and communications networks directly threaten food security. Road networks remain heavily mined. Vulnerability to landslide has always been a problem in Afghanistan. Landslides pose a dual risk to the transportation network, firstly by closing roads and secondly by increasing the risk of landmine incidents when landslides move mines directly into traffic lanes. Vast regions of Afghanistan are completely without transportation links.

The research team met one community representative who had walked 22 days from the Dar-e-Khudi Valley of Dai Kundi, Oruzgan to reach Bamyan to appeal for assistance for his community. He explained that there simply was no other way of reaching a government official. Market access in areas like Dar-e-Khudi has been poor under the best of times but has worsened because of the drought. People have either sold or have been unable to maintain their pack animals, such as horses, donkeys and camels that have historically provided critical transportation services. Likewise, bicycles, motorcycles and cars have been sold in order to raise much-needed cash.

*We have no roads. People travel to the district (Dai Kundi) to buy what they need. They used to transport the goods they bought by animals but since the animals have all died the people carry what they need on their backs. In other areas, the humanitarian organizations have done Food For Work for people to work on the roads but here, there are no roads. We are totally deprived.*

*Community Representative  
Dar-e-Khudi, Oruzgan*

The road infrastructure in Afghanistan has suffered from a lack of development investment. Of note, road development projects have strong economic and political impacts and bring unique benefits to donors: everyone knows who (the Americans, Russians, Taliban, etc.) built each stretch of road in Afghanistan. As the drought persists, Afghanistan will remain heavily reliant on imported food commodities, supplied both as relief and through commercial networks. Food prices, especially in more remote areas, are very sensitive to

*Last year it was too expensive to go the Herat market. It cost 7-8,000 Afghani to buy four kilograms of food. With the CHA roadwork project, the transportation cost came down by more than 1,000 Afghani. This made our lives much easier.*

*Man  
Shahrak District, Ghor*

<sup>6</sup> Focus group participants attributed the increase in demand in part to the presence of ISAF forces. The research team is also aware of the use of *hashish* by some foreign relief workers.

transportation costs. Where they have been undertaken, NGO interventions to improve road networks have directly improved food security by lowering commodity prices on local markets. As the drought has intensified, people have had to buy far more food than they grew or received as relief. Interventions to decrease the cost of commercial goods, such as road construction, communications infrastructure improvement and market repair, can contribute positively to food security. There is at present, however, no overarching strategy for road improvement to rationalize road repair and construction work undertaken by humanitarian organizations. More often than not, secondary, market and feeder roads are simply viewed as a “make work” mechanism to generate employment.

As agriculture production is restored in the post-drought era, primary and secondary market/feeder roads will be essential for raising farm incomes. Transportation interventions generate their own classes of winners and losers. For example, shopkeepers in Wardak reported an 80% decline in business as a result of the changing political situation that brought about the opening of the Salang Tunnel in recent months. The direct route between the western regions around Herat and Kabul (through Ghor, Bamyan and Wardak) is considerably shorter than the “ring road” that circumnavigates the north through the Salang Tunnel. The central east-west road, however, is unimproved, and truckers switched to the ring road as soon as the Salang Tunnel reopened. There is currently substantial interest in repairing primary roads in Afghanistan. While very important, road interventions also need to be undertaken in areas that have been historically isolated in the national transportation infrastructure, e.g. the central Hazarajat region, and remote regions in areas like Nurestan and Badakhshan.

### ***Socio-Political Risk and Vulnerability***

#### **War, Old and New**

More than two decades of conflict in Afghanistan have generated complex webs of social and political risks and vulnerabilities. Today, many in the study have limited coping strategies to deal with food insecurity. Instability and insecurity limit coping capacities, in part because economic and political crises have had deleterious effects on the kinship and social networks that previously served as safety nets for the most vulnerable in Afghan society.

The years of conflict and the legacy of the Taliban shaped the coping strategies used for survival by the majority of people in the study. While most of these strategies were remarkably successful, they were formed out of brutal necessity, and forced individuals, households and communities to adapt in ways that were financially, morally and socially difficult. Nonetheless, these strategies carried Afghan’s diverse population through very troubled times. At present, however, many people in our survey are left with few options for coping with the continuing food insecurity.

While widely criticized as a brutal and repressive regime, the Taliban nevertheless offered a certain modicum of stability in parts of the country for a brief period in Afghanistan's violent history. For instance, the Taliban initially were able to halt the sexual assault of women in some areas, and instilled a harsh but effective code of criminal law. Controls on poppy cultivation in certain areas decreased vulnerabilities arising from the narcotic trade. At the same time, however, Taliban soldiers were the main perpetrators of abuse, torture, burglary and murder in many parts of the country. The Taliban's restrictions on women (and associated vulnerability) have been well documented. Their arrests and harassment of men and boys further limited the effectiveness of household food security strategies. The targeted assaults on livelihood systems (as rendered, for instance, in the resistance stronghold of the Shomali Plains) destroyed the asset bases of entire regions and populations. Taliban tactics and terror led to the break-up of households as men were killed, daughters forced into marriage, and youth compelled to flee the country. Looting of households and shops was widespread, and people reported living in constant fear of a new round of pillaging and destruction. The specific vulnerabilities under the Taliban came in addition to the profound threats to life and livelihood already endured during the factional fighting from 1992-1996 and the various military campaigns that scarred the country in the 1970s and 1980s.

At this point in the interview, the woman cried and said, *"I had to give my 15 year old daughter to a Talib for marriage, in return for not bothering us/protecting us. Even though we did this, my husband was arrested twice."*  
*Woman, Eleventh district, Kabul*

Changes in physical security since the fall of the Taliban vary throughout the country. Vulnerability to Taliban abuses and armed conflict has decreased, but security has declined in other ways. The rise in crime in cities (such as Kabul, Qandahar, and Mazar-i-Sharif) and recent incidents of banditry on the roads (in Kunduz, Samangan, and between Helmand and Herat), hinder freedom of movement, increase psychological insecurity, and prevent unfettered access to markets, fields, and natural resources. Traders are particularly vulnerable to road banditry, while urban crime poses a constraint to all those attempting to do business or meet their daily needs within the cities. Although the end of the war between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance has brought closure to a phase of conflict and to specific risks along the northern frontline, security remains tenuous. People remain prepared for a sudden disintegration in stability and levels of safety.

*There are armed groups fighting in the area, and there is still a very serious sense of political and physical insecurity in our village.*  
*Laborer*  
*Dehdadie District, Balkh*

Women continue to face specific threats to their safety and physical security. Based on the teams' observations, a proportion of women in Kabul and on the university campus in Mazar-i-Sharif have stopped wearing the *burka*. Elsewhere, the majority of women, however, continue to remain covered in public. Women don *burkas* for many reasons, but protection is certainly an important element. For example, the March distribution of pamphlets in Qandahar warning parents not to send their girls to school and women not to go to work is limiting some women's mobility and is evidence of continuing threats to women.

On a broader political scale, commander-dominated enclaves are characterized by varying degrees of stability and administrative capacity. International actors, including the United States, Pakistan and Iran, for example, are actively working to influence authorities on national, regional and local levels. This outside involvement can be a positive force when, for instance, accompanied by generous contributions of assistance (such as the provision of relief assistance by the Government of Iran to IDPs living in the Russian Compound in Kabul and in the camps in Herat). Where negative, however, this increases tensions between progressives and conservatives in government, limits migration flows, threatens the security of refugees living in neighboring countries, and contributes to the emergence and strengthening of smuggling networks. The weak linkages between federal authorities in Kabul and provincial authorities elsewhere further contribute to instability.

The sudden increase in international attention towards Afghanistan has had mixed effects on food security. In the north, for instance, the cessation of conflict along the former frontline has decreased vulnerability and allowed populations to have better access to fields, markets and relief. In the east, however, the continuing US military campaign is resulting in increased food insecurity. At present, the political, military, and humanitarian agendas of the international community occasionally operate at cross-purposes. Political pressures to eradicate poppy production, for example, have recently brought unrest in some urban and rural areas. The military operation in the east is preventing humanitarian access and deliveries to the area. Disconnects in international agendas breed conditions of uncertainty and instability, and such conditions have important implications for food security. Such incoherence among political, military and humanitarian actors can limit mobility, discourage investment and threaten the capacity of humanitarian actors to provide assistance.

### **Politicized Ethnicity**

The connections among food security, ethnicity and political allegiance are important, especially at local levels. The collapse of the Taliban regime brought a sudden shift in power relations, increasing stability in some areas while contributing to upheaval in others. The populations once favored politically under the Taliban, such as the Koochi pastoralists and other Pashtun communities in the north, are facing renewed threats that have direct implications for food security. One example is access to water for irrigation, which is determined not only by wealth and geography but also by political allegiance. In contrast, those who were persecuted under the Taliban regime, such as Tajik and Uzbek supporters of the Northern Alliance, are once again receiving benefits due to ethnic and/or affiliations with local and national power structures.

*Two years ago, the village lacked water because the Taliban diverted the village's water sources and redistributed it to other areas. We were forced to rely on the springs and karezes but this was inadequate for cultivating everyone's lands and production was very low.*

*Men  
Charasyab District, Kabul*

Last year's political transition brought a rapid change in land tenure and access to water in many areas, as communities abandoned or reclaimed areas from which they had been

forcibly uprooted during earlier conflicts. In irrigated areas in the north, for instance, Tajik and Uzbek groups have recently returned to land lost under the Taliban, and have since denied downstream communities access to irrigation water, saying “This was done to the us in the past, so why shouldn’t we the same to others now?” While connections to local level commanders and authorities bring benefits linked to increased food security, lack of influence over these same actors increases vulnerability and heightens risk. For example, one landowner in Sar-e-Pul has used his political connections to lobby the local authorities for access to his fields where an IDP camp has been established. As a result, the governor and local commanders have been adamant in “encouraging” the IDPs to return to their home areas, many of which have no source of drinking water. The landowner’s political connections to those in power may increase his food security, while members of the displaced communities lack the political allegiances or power needed to ensure protection and maintain access to the services provided in the IDP camp.

Ethnic identity can determine individual and community access to goods and services. As the fate of the pastoralist Koochi population illustrates, this access is prone to sudden shifts as the political climate and power dynamic changes. The Koochi herders benefited from preferential status under the Taliban, and were granted access to land, crop residue, and water in areas beyond their traditional grazing routes in order to protect their livestock from drought. The Koochi were not welcomed by farmers who complained that the Taliban had allowed the Koochi to graze their livestock freely on growing crops. Farmers and urbanites in the south considered the Koochi to be unskilled and socially undesirable. Farmers and shopkeepers reported charging Koochi an additional 20% over the going market rate (described as “interest”) for wheat. Shopkeepers in the central highlands also set higher prices for their Koochi customers. The sudden fall of the Taliban brought an end to the benefits and privileges bestowed upon the Koochi.

Shifts in political power in recent months have also increased insecurity for other Pashtun communities. Under the Taliban, Pashtuns were settled on Tajik and Uzbek in northern areas, displacing these populations. A large number of Pashtuns fled the north and abandoned their land, homes, and stores following the defeat of the Taliban, fearing reprisal attacks from local communities. Recent conflicts with and reprisals against Pashtun communities have been reported elsewhere. While incidents of direct violence are difficult to verify, the UN in Mazar-i-Sharif says that Pashtuns are experiencing difficulties reclaiming access to water and shelter. UNHCR in Kunduz reported that displaced Pashtuns were reluctant to return to the area out of fear of attack or discrimination. Other communities are also facing new political risks, such as the Shi’a populations who perceive their political representation to be inadequate. In the Hazarajat, local authorities are working to reconcile aggrieved Hazara and Tajik communities.

### **Division of Labor**

Intra-household relations and divisions of labor contribute to vulnerability to food insecurity. Women and female-headed households are likely to have greater difficulty accessing distant sources of water and fuel, relief distribution sites, and sources of credit and other inputs (wool, non-food items, etc) in the district centers. Many widows lack

adequate access to land, or to the draft animals, labor, and other inputs required for a successful harvest. Women also face the threat of sexual violence, and suffer from lack of representation and educational and employment opportunities. Female-headed households may be unable to benefit from food-for-work or cash-for-work programs, and therefore may require targeted sustained and balanced distributions of food aid rations.

The demography of the family in Afghanistan has shifted due to conflict, political vulnerability and economic necessity. Young men of all ethnic groups were vulnerable to conscription by the Taliban and opposition forces, and many were forced to leave home in order to avoid conscription. The remaining household members often bore a dual burden due to this absence. Families not only had to pay monthly fines to the Taliban authorities for the absent male but they also lost the services of an able-bodied male. Many young men have not yet returned to their families. Remittances from male members living abroad contributed to improved food security for some families in the survey. The transmission of remittances appears to have declined in recent months due to currency instability and increased controls on Afghanistan's borders with neighboring countries, especially Iran and Pakistan.

In the context of economic crisis, male heads of households carry the financial burden and shame associated with debt and inability to provide for their families. Men are also the most likely to become involved in the dangerous narcotics industry, or to migrate to Pakistan or Iran in search of employment. The lack of regulations and protection for these workers—almost all of whom reside illegally in the in the host states—results in a specific set of occupational hazards.

Children and youth face a particular set of vulnerabilities in Afghanistan. Children act as the primary breadwinners in many families, especially in instances when adults are confined to the home due to debt, insecurity or disability. There is a direct relationship between household food security and access to education. Parents pull their children out of school when adults are unable to provide adequately for their families. It follows then that humanitarian, development,

*My father keeps telling me to stop going to school and to get to work in order to raise some money.*

Boy  
Saedebad District, Wardak

economic and diplomatic measures to increase food security should increase children's access to education.

Food insecure households send young boys away to work within Afghanistan and in neighboring states, usually as shepherds, domestics, or in service and industries (such as restaurants and carpet workshops) in urban areas. The surveys also showed widespread reluctant marriages of girls as young as seven or eight years old to (much) older men. Parents place young daughters into marriage for a range of reasons, most commonly to secure food or cash.

*It was very difficult for my children and me. I was thinking that I might not be able to feed my children, and I agreed to give my 9-year-old girl into marriage. My husband agreed to marry off my daughter. My ten-year-old son was working for someone who had a car. We sent our kids to collect fuel wood. There are many children from our villages who go far away to other villages to work as shepherds.*

Woman  
Shahrak District, Ghor

Young girls were also married to non-Taliban men in hopes of preventing abduction by or forced marriage to Taliban soldiers. Reports from northern frontline areas told of parents hiding male and female children in order to prevent their abduction by Taliban forces. In some instances, parents reported marrying their daughters to anyone able to provide the girls with food. Children working as employees or living with host families are likely to receive less adequate care than at home, thereby increasing their vulnerability to food insecurity.

*My dad always excused himself from the house at lunch or dinnertime in order to leave his food for us. There were many days that children only received one meal and the parents did not eat at all.*

*Young girl  
Chanabad District, Kunduz*

Most families in Afghanistan are based on the nuclear model, and parents go to great lengths to ensure adequate food for their children. For this reason, adults are as vulnerable to food insecurity as their children. Mothers and fathers alike reported skipping meals or reducing their own portions in order to ensure that their children's food needs were met. In some surveys, children said their fathers deliberately left the house at mealtimes so they would have enough to eat.

Migration and processes of urbanization have disrupted families, resulting in a transformation of inter-generational roles and relations. Elders have lost their important position as community leaders and mediators in dispute resolution. Food insecure households have sent children to live with grandparents on the (unspoken) assumption that the elderly will sacrifice their own food consumption in order to help the children.<sup>7</sup>

### **Location: The address is (almost) everything**

Food security in Afghanistan is partially determined by location, especially in terms of access to water and arable land. A community situated near to the Amu Darya River along the northern border of Afghanistan, for instance, is more likely to be food secure than one in a remote mountain village in Oruzgan. Based on water and geographic conditions, agricultural production can vary sharply from one valley to the next. Drought and conflict have heightened the effects of geographic vulnerability, creating mosaics of productive valleys and deeply drought-affected communities even within the same districts.

Three years of drought have compounded the geographic vulnerabilities of many communities in terms of access to natural resources. People are traveling greater distances to collect water and fuel, thereby increasing their risks to natural hazards (such as snakes, landmines, and heatstroke) and increasing exposure to security risks such as theft and banditry. The sale of means of transportation (cars, bicycles, and motorbikes) and sale or death of pack animals has also lengthened the time required to go to markets and to collect water, fuel and fodder. Poor and deteriorating road conditions and destruction of roads and bridges further compound this problem.

<sup>7</sup> This grim practice is humorously referred to as “surface to surface missiles”.

Location also plays a role in the ability of relief agencies to provide humanitarian assistance. Large parts of the country are inaccessible by road, and snow blocks access to mountainous regions for much of the (non-drought) year. As a result, the needs of some remote communities are poorly assessed or altogether unknown. Distribution points for remote areas are often far from the beneficiary communities, and residents must travel long distances over inhospitable terrain to receive relief goods. Individuals and families who lack access to pack animals or are unable to leave home for long periods have difficulty accessing the relief commodities. For example, during a seed distribution for the remote highland village in Kohistan District of Faryab Province, only the twenty villagers who owned donkeys made the ten-hour trip to collect the seeds. These seeds were not shared or distributed with other members of the community, but remained in the hands of the wealthier community members who had access to pack animals.

Geographic vulnerability relates closely to a community's proximity to areas of conflict. The frontline areas of the north saw repeated abuse and looting by the Taliban and faced waves of assault from various factions as the frontline continued to shift back and forth. Harvesting, accessing markets, and retaining control over productive, household, and human assets prove difficult under these conditions. Isolation (for example, in remote and inaccessible regions) could be a positive attribute by providing a modicum of protection. For example, residents of Balkab District in Sar-e-Pul Province destroyed the road leading into the settled area in order to slow the advance of and frequency of visits from Taliban troops. While providing protection for a time, such action deepens longer term vulnerability to food insecurity.

### ***Hazards: Afghanistan's Four (Plus) Horsemen of the Apocalypse***

Afghanistan suffers from high vulnerability to a range of hazards, including not only the current drought, but also snow, earthquake and flood disasters as well as vulnerability to locust infestation, a range of epidemics (measles, meningitis) and epizootics (rinderpest, CBPP). In addition to these natural hazards, the country remains polluted with landmines and unexploded ordinance (UXOs). Occupational risks pose yet another set of hazards, especially to the poor, the youth and the disabled.

### **Drought: Relief for the North & West; Crises in the South and East**

In the summer of 2001, the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) described the three years of drought in Afghanistan as the "worst in decades" (WFP 2001: 2). Sharp decreases in rainfall threatened Afghanistan's rain-fed agriculture sector (*lalmi*), prompted widespread losses in livestock holdings and reduced water available for irrigated agriculture (*daimi*). Meat, dairy, poultry, fruit and vegetable products have generally disappeared from the Afghan diet because of the drought, seriously exacerbating underlying vulnerability to

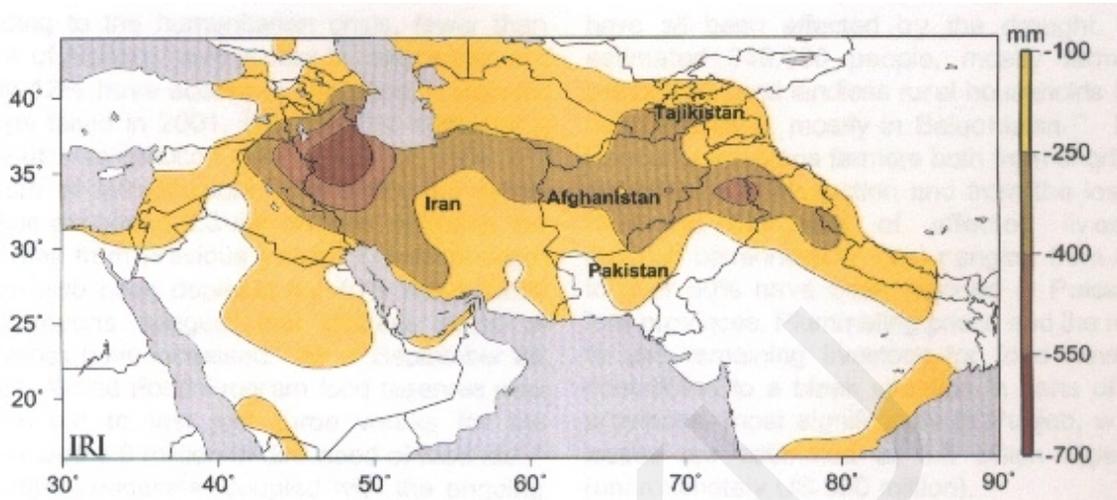
*This year, no one can find water in either the earth or sky. What will people do? They will not even have the ability to move. Life depends on water. There is no agriculture, no livestock, no industry. You cannot survive without water.*

*Military Man, Panjwei District,  
Qandahar*

micronutrient deficiencies, such as scurvy. The drought in Afghanistan is part of a region-wide problem of rainfall failures, as shown in Map II.

## MAP II. DROUGHT AFFECTED COUNTRIES IN THE REGION

Source: [iri.columbia.edu](http://iri.columbia.edu)



Despite encouraging spring rains in the north and the west, the drought in Afghanistan is not over and will not be at least until the spring of 2003. Even as this historical drought cycle breaks, it will take years (if not decades) of good rains and continued assistance before individuals, households and communities fully recover from the drought. In the meantime, the continuing threat of drought poses a serious risk for rural-urban drought displacement, especially in the coming summer months. Throughout Afghanistan, households have not only lost their farms and gardens, but also their ancestral orchards and vineyards, their livestock assets (cows and goats for milk, sheep and goats for wool, camels, donkeys and horses for transportation, oxen for animal traction), their savings and their wealth. Some possessions are gone forever, such as the heirlooms passed from one generation to the next, but sold in recent years because of desperate needs for cash. Families have also lost a multitude of daughters given prematurely into marriage.

*I had to sell a sword and a  
silk turban that I had  
inherited from my ancestors.  
Man (in tears)  
Jaghtu District, Wardak*

Winter precipitation patterns in Afghanistan are divided into two seasons. The first season (*chellah kalan*) of gentle rains and heavy snows is believed to be the most important for replenishing aquifers and underground water catchments. This season failed in key areas of Afghanistan, most notably the mountains of the Hazarajat. This region should be snowbound from November-April in years of average snowfall. Due to the failure of the snows, roads and mountain passes (e.g., O-Nay Pass in Wardak) remained open and accessible all winter, including to 2WD taxis and mini-buses. In a 27 March interview, the Bamyan Municipality reported that the snow pack on Baba Mountain should be ten meters at key passes. This year the snows reached only twenty

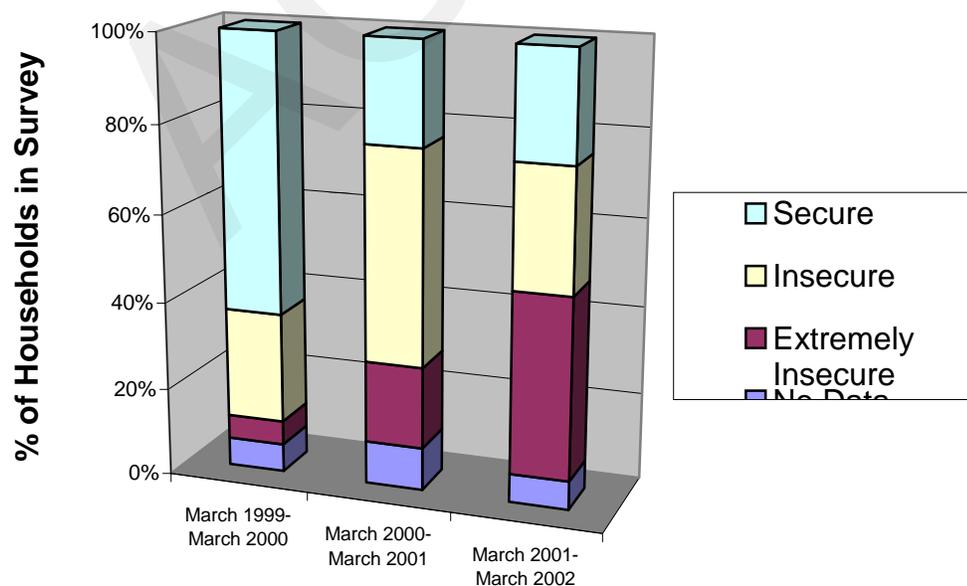
centimeters. The leader of the Hizba Wahdat (Khalili) told the research team on March 28 that in his fifty years “he had never faced such a drought.” He predicted that the trees would continue to die, including those 35 years and older. “Forget about irrigation,” he said, “there is a fundamental problem with drinking water.”

In the survey, households were categorized according to water security as per the indicators defined in Table IV below. Chart II, “Changes in Water Security,” depicts the deepening insecurity in household water use for consumption, hygiene, cooking and cleaning.

**TABLE IV. CLASSIFICATIONS OF HOUSEHOLD WATER SECURITY**

<b>Extremely insecure</b>	<b>Insecure</b>	<b>Secure</b>
Marked increase in labor spent fetching water (more than 2x the investment from years previous, statements that include “we now have to go really far”, etc.) Bathe and/or wash clothes equal to or fewer than 1 times per month, can’t afford soap or shampoo. Periods when there is no water; must borrow water from neighbors to point of nuisance to neighbors, complains of water – related health problems. Deepens well but well still runs dry. Wells have worms, water is described as muddy. Water tastes bad (bitter, sour, smelly)	Demographic shift in responsibility for collection of water within household. Bathe and/or wash clothes greater than 1 times per month, Must deepen well more than 1x per year but still gets water most of the time, must buy water, borrow water from neighbors with few problems. Water tastes off (salty); water drawn from stagnant sources. Usual source of water dries up but other sources available. Livestock and people using same sources.	Freely available or affordable; washes clothes and bathes as much as desired. Minimal labor to fetch water. All water easily accessed from well.

**CHART II. CHANGES IN WATER SECURITY**



According to Chart II, two years ago, in the first year of the drought, 27% of households were insecure and only an additional 6% could be classified as extremely insecure.

Household water security has since declined markedly. For the period covering March 2001 to March 2002, 30% of the households in the survey can be classified as insecure with nearly 45% of the households categorized as extremely insecure. The approximately 25% of secure households in the survey in the third year of drought included those near natural reservoirs (such as the scenic Bandi Amir region of Bamyan), farmers with riparian access and wealthy individuals who could finance the drilling of boreholes and the maintenance of powerful water pumps.

The lack of snow pack is a serious problem, but exact meteorological information is lacking. Aside from modest efforts by some NGOs (e.g. Madera in Beshud), there do not appear to be any government, UN, NGO or private entities that regularly measure the snow pack, snowfall or rainfall. The lack of snowfall in the central mountains poses immediate threats to the areas that have received little or no relief from the drought (e.g. most of the south and the central areas), while also threatening irrigation and drinking water sources in the north and the west. Many rivers trace their origins to the mountains of the Hazarajat, and the lack of snow will have repercussions throughout Afghanistan, especially later this summer. For example, the Baba Mountain that dominates the landscape of Bamyan feeds (at least):

1. The Balkhab River – Baba Mountain to Bandi Amir to Mazar-i-Sharif
2. The Bamyan River – Baba Mountain to Fuladi to Dukoni to Baghlan
3. The Ghorband River – Baba Mountain through the Ghorband Valley to the Shomali Plain
4. The Helmand River – Baba Mountain through Uruzgan to Helmand.

The second season of winter precipitation (*chellah khord*) is believed to consist of harder rains with a high degree of run off. This season produced reasonable amounts of precipitation in the north, west and select other areas, prompting widespread speculation by farmers (and some relief and development workers) that the drought had broken. Farmers in the north in particular have done all they can in order to plant wheat, including going even further into debt in order to finance the planting season. Where farmers were able to obtain seeds, either through relief programs or from the market, animal traction was the most important constraint on the areas sown. For example, in Sar-e-Pul only 30% of the land was reported planted despite encouraging spring rains because of a lack of adequate animal traction. Because of the lack of snow fall in the mountains it is premature to predict the end of the drought anywhere in Afghanistan. There is an Afghan saying that advises: don't buy a horse when it's raining or choose your wife at a wedding—in other words, it may be very difficult to gauge the depth of the drought while things are looking at their best.

The results are encouraging where water and inputs have come together adequately. In areas of Parwan Province, the (mined) road that climbs through the Ghorband Valley to the Shebar Pass traverses along green fields of well-established winter wheat. The almond trees that have survived the drought were in leaf or bloom in March, depending upon elevation, and water was running heavily in the Ghorband River. For those with access to water, the soil moisture content is likely to carry these crops through to harvest.

The snows of the Hazarajat, however, remain insufficient to supply rivers like the Ghorband River throughout the dry season.

While the *chellah khord* is important for replenishing surface area catchments, lakes and reservoirs, these rains also pose a risk for localized flooding. This was evident by flooding in the northwest region of Afghanistan this spring. In urban areas, risks from these floods have increased because water has not been flowing through the natural or man-made drainage systems over the past several years. The risk of flooding is particularly serious in urban areas such as Kabul where drains have been used for refuse disposal. In recent months, WFP and several NGOs have aggressively encouraged FFW and CFW investments in drain clearance in some urban areas to alleviate this threat.

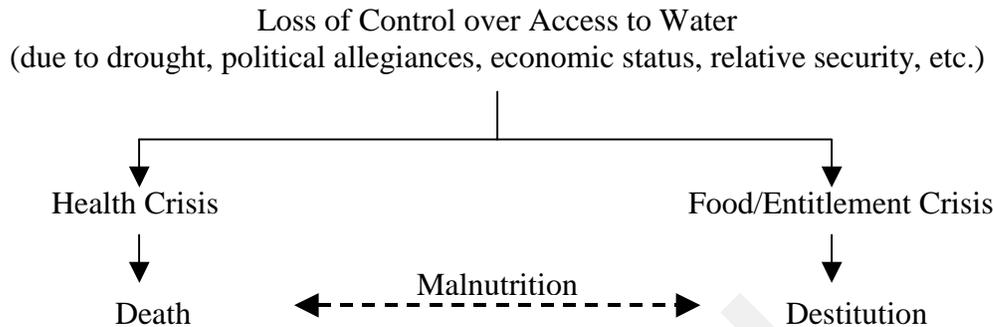
Although it is hoped that spring rains in parts of the north and the west will enable at least some winter wheat production, water stress is widespread in Afghanistan and water availability is limited in most rural and urban areas. Rivers such as the Arghan Dab and Harirod have at times dried up completely. In addition to limiting water for human consumption, the drought has profound economic consequences by limiting agriculture and fishery production output. For example, the white fish industry that was once fed by the Hamonsaberi Lake at the border of Nimroz and Farah collapsed completely when the lake dried up last year. Herat's rice fields have been damaged, leaving the city heavily dependent on imported rice from Pakistan and Iran. It is likely that rain-fed (*lamli*) agriculture will once again not be possible in many areas of Afghanistan this year, while output from irrigated agriculture (*daimi*) will also decrease further. These risks will continue to translate into widespread vulnerability for a range of populations.

The shortage of water has sharply curtailed new housing projects and/or the improvement of existing housing stock. Families in the survey reported pulling the timber poles from their roofs as a desperate coping mechanism for raising cash. This, of course, hastens the decline of already poorly maintained shelter. Meanwhile, demand for high quality housing is increasing in urban areas due to increased representation of the international assistance, diplomatic, military and media communities. In addition to creating problems for the general population, the competition for urban housing is disrupting humanitarian programs. (For example, several NGOs in Kabul were forced to relocate because they could not afford rents that have increased by as much as 1,000%). The housing problem will further intensify as refugees return to Afghanistan from abroad. In addition, persistent drought is likely to induce rural-urban migration in the coming months.

The pattern and nature of vulnerability is deeper and broader than predicted by the WFP VAM survey of last summer. Vulnerability has been deepening and spreading over the past several months, and is increasing in many areas. As the drought enters its fourth year, control over access to water is a primary determinant of a household's ability to avoid either destitution and/or death. In all areas studied, there is presently widespread food insecurity across a range of urban and rural populations. In the focus group surveys, examples food security were rare and were limited to those with steady access to water (e.g. people who owned irrigated land near rivers with water, people living near natural reservoirs). Shortages of water – for drinking, for maintaining hygiene, for preserving

livestock herds, orchards and vineyards, for producing crop and vegetable gardens and for maintaining shelter -- are creating health and food security crises by either leading to health crisis and/or leading to food and other entitlement crises, as per Figure I below.

**FIGURE I. FOOD SECURITY AND ACCESS TO WATER**



(Adapted from Alex de Waal, *Famine That Kills*, 1989)

The lack of water creates two serious humanitarian crises: death and destitution. Death results when limited water supplies translate into threats to health, including vulnerability to diarrheal diseases (exacerbated and accelerated by malnutrition and general physical exhaustion.) Households lose control over water resources for a range of reasons. Based on the surveys, a typical destitution pathway is: Drought => crop failure, loss of livestock, orchards, gardens and vineyards => mortgage of assets => further indebtedness => loss of assets (land, house, family members, savings, assets) => destitution. Vulnerable households complained that the water strategies of some wealthy households were draining water from the poor, creating or exacerbating widespread food insecurity and health problems. Wealthy households and those with access to credit have found that the only way to preserve agriculture outputs and assets is to drill deep wells, installed with powerful pumps. This hastens the depletion of the water table in the area, causing the surrounding shallow wells to fail,<sup>8</sup> leading the poor and the marginalized down the dual pathways of health crises and food/entitlement failures.

In similar fashion, water interventions by some NGOs and UN agencies are inadvertently draining water from the poor, creating or exacerbating widespread food insecurity and health problems. This is especially true where water interventions are not adequately maintained or where the installation of hand pumps is not implemented according to standards, e.g. the SPHERE standards, or as part of a broader strategy to preserve minimum access to water.

In water stressed areas, food security was affected by two elements: **access** to water (a function of the water strategies of the wealthy, some UN/NGOs water interventions, local authorities ability to control and coordination drilling, e.g. some communities in Wardak

<sup>8</sup> This would be true if the wells all draw from the same aquifer. More research on water resource issues and related vulnerabilities is needed to fully understand this dynamic.

have been able to ban the drilling of deep wells) and **availability** of water (a function of drought, wealth/historical riparian rights, geography, cropping patterns, etc.

### **Multiple Hazards: When It Rains, It Pours -- and Other Disasters**

Even when the drought finally eases in Afghanistan, the country will remain prone to a multitude of other disasters including floods, snows, earthquakes, landmines and occupational hazards. This combination of risks challenges humanitarians in Afghanistan and poses a serious development challenge. There is not, at present, capacity in Afghanistan (either within the structures of national government or within the external assistance community) to assess, analyze and manage responses to such a diverse range of threats. Positive lessons from earlier donor – UN - national government investments in disaster assessment and management, e.g. Ethiopia in the mid 1980s/early 1990s need to be transferred to Afghanistan so that national capacity to manage disasters – what could be called “humanitarian governance” – is built.

The protracted drought in Afghanistan has led to widespread failures of pasturelands and the death of trees and shrubs. The harvesting of trees and shrubs has gained new importance as a coping strategy in recent years. The collection of wood has become a new livelihood for recently unemployed shepherds, for example. Wood is used as fuel for heating and cooking as well as sold or exchanged for food. Demand for wood has increased while the supply has been sharply limited by the drought, accelerating underlying vulnerabilities to deforestation and denuding.

In addition, demand for fuel wood has increased because of widespread decimation of livestock herds and associated losses of dung for fuel. In the first years of the drought, families depleted their stocks of dried dung that were used for cooking and heating. This source of fuel is particularly prevalent in areas with poor land cover, e.g. the Hazarajat. The further loss of land cover and reduced availability of dung for fuel has deepened food insecurity in the households. Families are heating fewer rooms (usually one, down from two) and cooking less often. The resulting crowding poses both health and social risks to families, and is particularly problematic given the high prevalence of acute respiratory infection (ARI) in Afghanistan during the long winter months.

Historically, large-scale wood harvesting for export has been controlled by the commander-dominated war economy. Under the best of circumstances harvesting of timber and shrubs has not been sustainable in Afghanistan. In areas of the south and the west, teams of laborers are deployed to range land where they not only cut bushes but also pull entire root systems as well. Some of this wood is destined for export to drought-prone areas of Pakistan. In the focus group surveys, households described having to invest ever-increasing amounts of labor and/or money into procuring wood for each year that the drought has intensified. In several areas, e.g. Bamyan and Wardak, households reported that all natural resources of wood and shrubs had been exhausted. These families survived by burning their orchards and vineyards that, for the most part, had died

in the drought. In other areas, e.g. Kunduz, families were cutting living trees for fuel and income. Elsewhere, some families reported burning plastics.

The loss of tree cover, root systems and pastures has deepened vulnerability to earthquake, flood, avalanche and landslide while also harming watersheds. Soils have reduced capacity for moisture retention, increasing rates of runoff. Spring flooding in northeast Afghanistan attested to these combined vulnerabilities. In some urban areas, relief organizations are working to clear long-neglected drainage systems with Food For Work and Cash For Work programs. Longer-term development investments are needed in order to refurbish drainage systems and rationalize urban growth in order to decrease urban flood vulnerability. Post-drought reforestation and pasture development will be important, especially in rural areas.

While snows were limited this winter due to continuing drought conditions, the many mountainous regions of Afghanistan remain vulnerable to snow disasters. Highly food insecure households reported that they had pulled and sold the timber beams in their roofs in order to buy food. While deepening vulnerability to earthquakes, this practice badly weakens roofs and can be disastrous in heavy snows. Even under the best of circumstances, the traditional Afghan mud and pole roof construction is vulnerable to snow damage; men have responsibility for shoveling snow off roofs throughout snowstorms in order to prevent their collapse.

Where there is adequate moisture because of spring rains or isolated snowfall, animal and plant diseases are also being regenerated. Locusts and other threats to plant health, e.g. stem borers, have returned to the north. Successful control of these threats has as much to do with the commitment and engagement of local leaders as the capacity of the UN and NGO actors in charge of programs in a given area. Results are mixed because of uneven capacities to address these threats that know no borders between provinces, for example.

Imports of livestock from Pakistan for use in agriculture may bring trans-boundary animal health diseases that could threaten the viability of the Afghan livestock owning communities. There are no quarantine facilities or diagnostic labs in Afghanistan and these imports are not controlled or regulated. Kabul's only vaccine laboratory was badly damaged by the US military bombardment. Buffalo imports may pose a serious health risk to the surviving Afghan cattle populations, especially since Pakistan is one of three remain global foci for the deadly cattle disease Rinderpest. Other animal diseases such as pleuropneumonia, sheep pox, black leg, Foot and Mouth, rabies, acute influenza, etc. are prevalent and problematic. These diseases, along with acute shortages of animal fodder and water sources, directly threaten food security. The majority of households in the study had lost or sold most or all of their livestock (and hence their only supplies of milk, meat and poultry products) as the combined result of animal disease, drought and economic stress. These stresses have also led to widespread losses in animal traction capacities.

Shepherds are a uniquely vulnerable group in Afghanistan. Many have lost their livelihoods because of livestock losses. Shepherds and other similarly mobile groups, including children and adults who are forced by drought conditions to go farther and farther to gather wood and fetch water, truckers who negotiate Afghanistan's difficult roads, and farmers who plow their fields all face acute problems with landmines. Landmines also pose a risk to humanitarian operations; few humanitarian organizations will work in areas not formally cleared by de-mining teams. Increasing vulnerability to landslides and other road-related hazards (e.g. road construction), avalanches and floods make the landmine threat a constantly changing hazard. Where rains have fallen after long periods of drought, water is returning to dry waterways, bringing new lands under cultivation after years of laying fallow. This, too, poses a threat of landmines to farmers, especially since many water catchment areas were deliberately mined over the course of the war. Because of the drought, however, families and laborers are only now returning to these waterways with associated risks of landmines.

A final category of hazard in Afghanistan that threatens food security is occupational hazards. The use of child labor is widespread in Afghanistan. The dominance of the war economy, poverty and a lack of development combine to create an unsafe working environment for children and adults working in Afghanistan, as well as in the surrounding countries, especially Iran and Pakistan. Carpet weaving is labor intensive, and conditions of production are deteriorating as families – especially children -- are forced to spend longer and longer hours on carpet production. Extensive exposure to carpet weaving causes physical deformation (hunched backs, deformed pelvises in girls) as well as neurological stress (facial tics, poor concentration, deteriorating eyesight). Afghanistan's coal miners are singularly without protection. As workers become ill, they have no choice but to retire without assistance or care. In coal, as in other industries, such as chemically fertilized agriculture and oil production, there are few protections for either workers or the environment.

Illegal migrant laborers from Afghanistan in Pakistan and Iran have no health care or legal protections. The focus group surveys revealed that injury, sickness and death to migrants working abroad is an important source of indebtedness for their families in Afghanistan who must finance care, transportation and/or funeral expenses for the sick and wounded in neighboring countries. Narcotics trafficking is a particularly dangerous occupation, especially for the young men from the western provinces who dominate the lower echelons of the trafficking networks.

### ***Relief Inadequacies: The Aspirations-Reality Gap***

A fourth source of vulnerability to food insecurity, in addition to economic vulnerabilities, political issues and hazards, rests with the humanitarian communities in Afghanistan. There is a gap between humanitarian aspirations and relief realities (i.e., the nature, quality and quantity of assistance actually reaching vulnerable households), and food security persists as a result. In this moment of focused political will and attention, the problem is not so much one of resources (although key sectors remain

under-funded) as much as absorptive capacity. The resulting gap is as much due to the extreme logistical challenges posed by the Afghan terrain as is it a holdover from years of limited assistance to Afghanistan to build up the (international and national) capacity to manage relief assistance. While talent abounds in Afghanistan (some of the world's finest relief experts have been sent to manage operations in the UN and NGOs in recent months), it is largely concentrated at the heads of agency level and in the urban areas, particularly Kabul. Vulnerable populations themselves have limited capacity to access relief organizations because of limitation in transportation, differences in language and culture and inadequate systems of governance to link those who need with those who can assist, for example.

Prior to AIA, only a minority of drought and conflict affected households and communities in Afghanistan were assisted with international aid. This was due to a combination of insecurity, political isolation, inadequate donor support, and, to a lesser extent, poor information about the nature and distribution of suffering in Afghanistan. Continued conflict in Afghanistan precluded access to some of the worst affected communities living in front line areas, for example. Historic geo-political tensions in particular limited the ability of international staff, including staff from USAID, to work in Afghanistan.

Since the events in the US of September 11, 2001 and the US-led bombing campaign in Afghanistan that commenced in October 2001, humanitarian relief operations have increased exponentially. Donor pledges of assistance have been broadcast widely and there has been a visible increase in the number of relief workers, vehicles and offices, especially in urban centers in Afghanistan. The value of the Afghani currency has been buoyed in part because of the expectations that the people of Afghanistan hold for the humanitarian community. Refugees have based their decisions to migrate back to Afghanistan in part based on expectations of generous and sustained assistance to their home areas, expectations that have been fueled by media broadcasts.

All UN and NGOs in country have been challenged by these rapid increases of visibility, resources, expectation and responsibilities. Some have managed better than others, and there are notable examples of impressive humanitarian relief operations undertaken by national Afghan organizations, international NGOs, the Red Cross and the United Nations agencies. The majority of households in the survey received relief assistance this year, and most of this assistance was directed towards areas identified by the UN (especially WFP's vulnerability assessments) as being greatest in need. Food aid and emergency water interventions had the most obvious impact on households in the focus group interviews.

Despite impressive results in humanitarian operations, however, few households have received adequate assistance to reverse downward trends in food security. This is due to continuing challenges facing disaster-affected populations and relief organizations alike in remote areas, as well as inadequacies in the bundle of assistance being provided (e.g. a limited depth and breadth of relief interventions). There remains a strong bias in relief distributions closer to urban areas and major road networks. The capacity for delivering

relief assistance lags behind donor commitments and agency aspirations (as well as actual needs) because of relief organization limitations in human, operational and logistical capacities, and (to a lesser extent) the security challenges that the current conflict in Afghanistan poses for external actors.

### **Food Aid: Relieving Food Insecurity or Merely a Light Dusting of Wheat Flour?**

The bulk of relief assistance that reached households in the focus group interviews was in the form of food aid. Since October, WFP and its implementing partners have distributed over 350,000 MT of food aid, mostly wheat. **Where food aid commodities have reached food insecure areas, distributions of emergency relief food assistance have saved lives, discouraged migration, protected families from further indebtedness and allowed families to delay the “desperation” marriages of young girls.** This is particularly true in areas where relief rations were sustained, generous and balanced (e.g. included more than wheat flour but also included pulses, oil and, in rare instances, tea, salt, sugar, etc.).

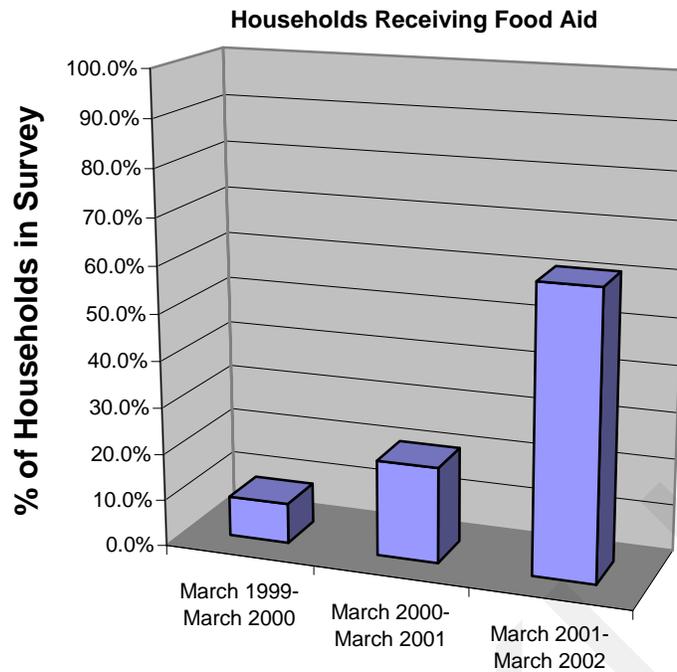
*We were in a terrible cycle of our lives. We were about to move to another country. We were about to leave our village, but then we received wheat from CHA, which prevented us from migrating.*  
Man,  
Toolak District, Ghor

Widespread selling of relief commodities was reported in the surveys and in the key informant discussions with traders and shopkeepers. The team estimates that food aid sales have, on average, depressed the price of wheat by approximately 15% - 20%.<sup>9</sup> Given the volume of wheat being distributed in Afghanistan, food aid has had a relatively modest impact on wheat prices. Nevertheless, depressed prices are a disincentive to farmers trying to cultivate surplus wheat for sale, e.g. in Nangahar, especially since the cost of production has risen in recent years (due to increased costs for water and the need to invest in replacements for animal traction, etc.)

As Chart III indicates, the focus group surveys indicated that there has been a massive increase (from just below 9% to over 60%) in the percentage of households receiving food aid during the period from March 1999/2000 to March 2001/2002. The sharpest increases have been over the past year, with the percentage of households receiving food aid increasing by approximately 300% (from just under 20% to just under 60%).

### **CHART III. PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS RECEIVING FOOD AID, 1999 – 2002**

<sup>9</sup> The effect of relief distributions of wheat on commercial prices for wheat was estimated by comparing price trends for rice with price trends for wheat. Rice has not been distributed in sizeable quantities in Afghanistan and its price fluctuations are a good general approximation for the currency- and transport-related price swings that affect wheat. Any difference between the trends in wheat and rice price patterns was assumed to be a result of food aid distributions. Our calculations also coincided with the estimates provided to the research team by shopkeepers, traders and transporters.



Despite the tremendous increase in relief assistance, the depth and breadth of food insecurity in Afghanistan continues to challenge the effectiveness of short-term interventions. The majority of households in the survey had received assistance only one time, and the assistance was limited to wheat or wheat flour. While fleeting, these distributions had positive effects on the households. e.g., “we could eat bread for the first time in months.” However, the distributions were too limited and too infrequent to reverse the multi-year deterioration in food security that households have experienced (e.g. going deeply into debt, eating only starch-based commodities, selling livestock and other key household assets, etc.) The food aid commodity baskets, for the most part, lack diversity and therefore are not contributing adequately to alleviating one of the most pressing nutritional problems in the country, i.e., micronutrient deficiencies.

Important lessons should be derived from recent experiences of providing food aid relief to Afghanistan. The humanitarian community should be encouraged by the success of its effort in reaching the majority of households in the survey. Despite tremendous logistical, operational and security concerns, it is possible to conduct humanitarian operations in Afghanistan. The successes to date underscore the importance of the strategic use of food aid in the immediate and longer term in Afghanistan. Food aid distributions are needed for vulnerable households (e.g. female headed-households, deeply impoverished households with young children and few/no available able-bodied men who can work). Targeted, balanced, sustained and generous food rations can be an important mechanism for keeping highly vulnerable populations alive. For these populations, dependency by the structurally vulnerable on the aid community for food aid rations may be a positive alternative to the more desperate and limited measures these groups may face (e.g. growing poppy, migrating to cities, reluctantly forcing premature

daughters into marriage with older men and/or men living in distant provinces or other countries, e.g. Iran, Pakistan, etc.)

The bulk of the food aid has been distributed in areas identified by the World Food Program's Vulnerability Assessment Map (see Annex I) that was compiled last summer based on extensive assessments throughout the country. The close correlation between deliveries and identified vulnerabilities is evidence of an encouraging degree of impartiality in humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan. This degree of impartiality means that, for the most part, assistance is flowing to areas based on identified needs (rather than political imperatives, for example).

In the focus group surveys, households were asked to describe changes in their diet over the past three years. In order to cope with production failures, deepening poverty and losses of income, vulnerable individuals and families have reduced their overall consumption, quality and diversity in their diet. The declines have not been distributed equally within families.

These adaptations in the diet increase vulnerability to micronutrient deficiencies, classified as both Type I and Type II deficiencies (Golden, M. et al). Vulnerability to micronutrient deficiencies is accelerated by diarrheal diseases. Over the period March 2001 – March 2002, the majority of the households in the survey relied on diets based nearly exclusively on starches (rice gruels, bread, potatoes) because source of fruit, vegetables, milk, meat and poultry products have vanished because of the drought. There is a national nutritional crisis in Afghanistan but it is not manifesting itself in any form of classic "famine" images, e.g. the protein-energy deficient kwashiorkor child, so familiar to many from famines in Africa. These micronutrient deficiencies are contributing to stunting in children, poor concentration, reproductive health problems, blindness, growth failure, etc., and inhibit the proper utilization of consumed food resources by the body. While representing serious health concerns in the short term, micronutrient deficiencies represent a challenge to the development of Afghanistan.

Families were classified as secure, insecure or extremely insecure based on their diet, as per Table V "Classifications of Diet Security".

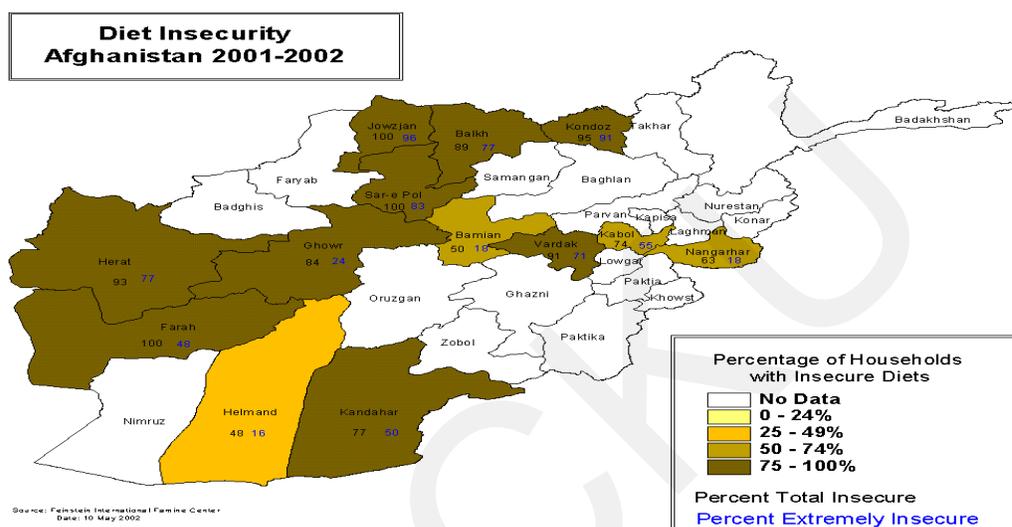
**TABLE V. CLASSIFICATIONS OF HOUSEHOLD DIET SECURITY**

<b>Extremely Insecure</b>	<b>Insecure</b>	<b>Secure</b>
Purchases meat less than 1 time per year or sometimes consumes intestines. Diet does not include fruit or vegetables. Sole reliance on 1 – 2 poverty foods. Skips meals, barley flour comprises no more than 50% in the bread mix, no milk products, etc.	Relies on range of poverty foods but does get occasional vegetables. Purchases meat more than 1x per year but less than 2x per month, skips meals but has meat 1 – 2 times per weeks, receives food aid, some barley in wheat/barley bread, only source of vegetables is wild vegetables	Consumes meat more than twice per month. Diet includes vegetables and fruit, lives off own production, mostly pure wheat bread, regular supply and variety of milk products

While the scale of the relief operation is laudable, humanitarian relief operations have thus far not offset food insecurity on a national scale in Afghanistan. Despite a massive

increase in humanitarian effort, the overwhelming majority of households in the survey are more insecure now with respect to diet, debt and asset bundles than they were prior to the drought, for example. As Map II “Diet Insecurity – Afghanistan 2001 – 2002” indicates, households are highly vulnerable to nutritional crises throughout Afghanistan. Diet insecurity is critical even in those areas that have received the most aggressive distributions of disaster relief. The resulting “aspirations-reality gap” should serve as a humbling reminder of the depth of the challenge facing the humanitarian community in Afghanistan. In order to achieve food security in Afghanistan, humanitarian relief and development operations will need to be long term, generous, sustained and focused.

**MAP II. DIET INSECURITY IN AFGHANISTAN 2001 - 2002**



### **Relief Operations Management: Challenges of Logistics, Management, Security Transportation, Communication, Information and Coordination**

Despite impressive increases in the proportion of households receiving assistance in recent months, Afghanistan’s poor road and communication infrastructure limits the “reach” of humanitarian organizations in Afghanistan. Coupled with insecurity due to on-going coalition military operations and conflicts between commanders of politicized ethnic groups and landmines, the pattern of relief operations in Afghanistan remains biased towards urban areas and near road networks.

This misdistribution of relief efforts limit the quality of information about the broader distribution of vulnerability to food insecurity, leading to an overrepresentation of urban-based needs and an under-estimation of needs in more remote areas. WFP’s helicopter-based rapid assessments have tried to overcome this problem of information bias. However, the helicopter assessments have limitations of their own, including security constraints that limit the time that teams can spend on the ground (e.g. 2 – 3 hours) and the limited types of areas that are conducive to helicopter operations (e.g. those areas

with flat expanses of land as opposed to deep and narrow valleys or steep mountain areas.)

The clustering in urban areas should theoretically lead to better coordination of relief operations across agencies. Despite a multitude of coordination mechanisms, however, there was little evidence of effective coordination at the provincial and sub-provincial levels, except where extraordinary individuals had exercised a degree of (positive) influence over the distribution of relief efforts. Even where needs were identified, there was not an empowered entity in Afghanistan that could, in effect, order the redistribution of relief efforts from one area to another. The AIA has yet to extend its reach outside of Kabul; the UN agencies remain resistant to inter-agency coordination at the provincial and sub-provincial level; NGOs and relief agencies alike are wary of efforts by local authorities to coordinate them; and, donors are not actively present in operational areas. Combined, these factors are contributing to an atmosphere of “to each his own”, i.e., agencies are doing their best within their mandates, capacities and resources, fairly unencumbered by the demands of coordination mechanisms.

The inability of USAID staff to monitor adequately the USAID programs is problematic. For example, the research team discovered that one NGO’s planned supplemental food aid ration for distribution to malnourished children was too low in fat, too high in sugar and inadequate in fiber but there was no one on staff who was technically qualified to notice this. While the presence of USAID staff is useful for addressing technical deficiencies in programs such as these, many problems hindering effective relief work are political in nature, e.g. the need to settle squabbles between organizations, to assess organizations’ implementation capacities, to critically review financial records, to motivate coordination mechanisms, to push organizations to work in un-served areas, etc. Tensions between local authorities and humanitarian organizations are high in some areas. Mr. Khalili, leader of the Hizbi Wahdat, spoke to the research teams about his frustrations regarding the humanitarian community in the Hazarajat (where, in addition to the legitimate concerns noted by authorities, the research teams observed some excellent relief work being implemented under difficult circumstances). A more visible USAID field presence is needed to help to bridge gaps between authorities and humanitarians while also empowering authorities in their efforts to provide leadership and coordination in humanitarian activities.

The clustering of relief operations in urban areas and road networks is one factor that limits vulnerable populations’ access to relief organizations. Other agency-imposed barriers also are limiting vulnerable populations access to relief, e.g. security constraints that (international) organizations have put in place (e.g. guards that block visitors from entering compounds, locating offices away from population centers), language barriers between relief workers and local populations, etc. Local authorities play an important role in facilitating (or not) communication between vulnerable populations and relief organizations, leading to the exclusion from relief operations of populations that lack local political representation in urban areas. This is particularly problematic for IDP populations.

There is an inescapable reality that there is a gross imbalance of power between relief workers and the impoverished communities they seek to assist. These imbalances need to be approached by relief workers with a sense of humility and grace -- qualities that were not always employed adequately in many of the areas visited by the research teams. In part, this is due to a lack of direct supervision between Kabul-based managers and field programs due to their own heavy work loads as well as poor communication and transportation infrastructure. In addition, the lack of an empowered Afghan authority to coordinate and oversee relief operations and the absence of any effective donor monitoring at the field level further contributes to arrogance on the part of some relief workers, both national and international. In addition to serving as a threat to the security of individual relief workers and their organizations, such displays of poor judgment also increase the food insecurity of needy populations that are trying to adapt to the presence of a multitude of (often new) organizations.

Relief organizations with long experience in Afghanistan have had to “scale up” very quickly in order to respond to the influx of donor resources, while a number of organizations without substantial (or any) experience in Afghanistan have commenced operations. Many relief organizations are facing capacity problems. Qualified national staff are in heavy demand and are sought after aggressively by some organizations, leading to rapid turnover of staff and also contributing to the de-capacitation of quality national organizations. For example, the impressive Afghan NGO Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (CHA) has struggled to keep their rural health, infrastructure, nutrition and agriculture programs adequately staffed in rural areas because their well-trained staff are much sought after by (higher paying) international organizations. Few international organizations are requiring long term commitments from their international staff, again leading to unhelpful instability in the structure of relief organizations.

Because of the surge in demand for relief workers, the quality of the staff employed is uneven. Afghanistan has attracted some of the world’s finest relief experts, especially at the senior management level. For some organizations, it has been more difficult to attract adequately technically qualified staff for programs at the field level. Based on the research teams’ interactions with the relief community, there appeared to be insufficient awareness of some of the technical aspects of relief programs, especially at the provincial and sub-provincial levels, e.g., very low awareness of the SPHERE standards or similarly internationally accepted protocols for relief operations. In part, this is due to the legacy of donor neglect of Afghanistan; staff simply have not been given the opportunity to capitalize on training and education programs. In part, it is due to difficulties with transportation and communication between the center and the periphery. Lastly, it is due to the sharp increase in demand for relief workers. It would appear that those without experience are usually first deployed to remote regions.

## **Coping with Food Insecurity**

People are employing a range of strategies in order to cope with diverse risk and vulnerabilities. The study examined a range of coping strategies employed over the last three years of drought. As already discussed, many people in the country went from a

position of security to extreme insecurity in this time. The data is meant to illustrate common themes and strategies employed at the household level. To this end, information is presented on how people coped with food insecurity under the categories of diet, asset depletion, debt, water use, un-Islamic activities, migration/remittances, fuel, and celebration of the Qurbani Eid. The lists below present some examples of coping strategies under each category.

## Diet

- Decrease diversity of diet, cut out fruits, vegetables, meat, and dairy
- Increase consumption of poverty foods such as *sholeh*, *piawah* and corn flour
- Decrease food consumption by eating smaller amounts or skipping meals
- Mixing barley flour and legume flour with wheat flour
- Consuming new food sources, such as intestines and commodities usually reserved for animals, such as *arzan* (chicken feed) and *kunjarah* (livestock fodder)
- Rely entirely on bread and tea
- Fathers leaving during meals time in order to ensure adequate food for the children, send children to relatives

*Two years? What are you talking about? It's been five or six years that we've been living in this misery. We're fighting to stay alive. Our diet is most comprised of litti (water and flour) and corn bread. There are so many nights that we go to bed hungry. Our only income is from making carpets and we are sick of it. We do not have any enjoyment or entertainment. We even do not have patience to listen to others. We are going crazy. We are losing our minds. We have to work long hours making carpets and all we think about is food.*

*Group of teenage girls  
District 6, Kabul*

*This was the worst year of our lives. We girls sat in the kilim workshop day and night, and it did not matter if we were sick, tired, or hungry. Even with the difficulties, harshness, and boredom, we were doing our best to help our families survive. There was not work for our fathers and our mothers were not able to work outside the home. We did not have any other option or choices—we had to work very hard or else face the death of our families.*

*Young girls  
Nahr-e-Shahie, Balkh*

## Asset Depletion

- Sale of electronic or household appliances (such as radios) and other non-essential household assets
- Living off cash savings and food stocks
- Sale of jewelry
- Means of transportation sold (cars, bicycles, motorcycles)
- Key productive assets sold or placed in *mazarabat* (sewing machines, loom for making carpets, store inventory owned by others under *mazarabat*)
- House, orchard, vineyard, croplands placed under lien (*gerawie*)
- Sale of livestock, including dairy animals
- Allow gardens and orchards to die for lack of water
- Sell essential household assets (blankets, mattresses, remaining pots)

*Two years ago, I had 400 sheep and was saving money. Last year, I sold half of my sheep in order to buy food for my family and fodder for my remaining livestock (200 sheep). This year, most of the livestock have died and no one is buying the survivors.*

*(a formerly) wealthy man  
Panjwei District, Qandahar*

- Sale of family heirlooms
- Cannibalism of shelter (sale of tents and ceiling poles)
- Access lost to only residence through sale or seizure

*Two years ago, people lived off their lands, their livestock and their orchards and vineyards. The drought was not so serious. People were able to access water for their lands, and the lands were irrigated from the river. People were achieving reasonable harvests. The laborers would work for the landowners. Most of the people had stocks of lindi (dried meat) and had access to milk products, plenty of eggs and vegetables. As agriculture production declined because of the drought, most of the people were obliged to sell their household assets and livestock in order to purchase food. The sale of oxen negatively affected the farmers because they were not able to cultivate their lands. The sale of cows negatively affected the village children because there was no longer enough milk production.*

*Farmer*

*Charasyab District, Kabul*

## Debt

- Short term borrowing until next harvest
- Intra-generation borrowing from male relatives (brothers, cousins) or from fathers and uncles
- Borrowing from males in younger generation, e.g., sons and sons-in-law
- Taking non-interest loans
- Taking loans to finance harvest
- Borrowing from neighbors
- Borrowing from local shopkeepers
- Taking loans to meet food needs
- Taking loans to finance medical crises or funeral expenses
- Taking loans with interest
- Borrowing from shopkeepers outside the immediate area
- Borrowing from employers
- Engaging family members in work for debtors (e.g., carpet-making workshops)
- Giving daughters to money lenders as collateral

*“Almost everyone in the village borrowed either money or food from the city. Many people cannot now go back to the market because they borrowed so much. Almost all of us borrowed wheat or seeds to plant, and none of us have the money to pay. I cannot bear to think that this coming year will be another failure.”* Shopkeeper, Nahr-e-Shahie, Balkh

*My dad was unable to pay his debt from the previous two years. The lender was coming and asking for the money. Then the lender asked my father for my little sister in exchange for the debt. It made our life miserable and my dad started fighting.*  
Young girl  
Iman Sahib, Kunduz

## Water use

- Increase time required to fetch water
- Decrease frequency of washing clothes and bathing
- Increase family labor to collect water
- Deepening wells
- Rehabilitating water storage systems
- Watering orchards and gardens by hand

- Sharing sources of water with livestock
- Land left fallow due to drought
- Gardens and orchards not planted or allowed to die
- Sale or death of water due to lack of water for animals
- Buying water
- Borrowing water to the point of nuisance to neighbors
- Use of stagnant or compromised sources of water (wells known to have parasites or worms)
- Spending majority of time fetching water

*The availability of water is very poor here. We have no public bathhouses. Some of the wells that were built by the NGOs have become very salty, or dried up altogether. During the summer, we have a lot of health problems. . . . All the kids suffer from diarrhea during the summer.*  
*Man*  
*District 12, Kabul*

### Un-Islamic Activities

- Begging (usually done by women and children)
- Failing to repay loans (source of heavy shame, burden for families after death)
- Taking loans with interest
- Participating in militias or armed groups
- Use of hashish
- Cultivation of narcotics
- Trafficking of narcotics
- Sending young children far from home for work
- Widespread premature marriage of young girls both within and outside the community (for cash, food, fuel, or for their own security)
- Marriage of young girls to money lenders as collateral
- Marriage of young girls outside the country
- Prostitution (in rare instances)

*My husband was involved in drug smuggling. He was arrested and killed. He left two children behind with me. There are people who have sold their kids in our area, and some people put their daughters into marriage for the money.*

*Woman*  
*Shulgarah District, Balkh*

### Migration

- Young men move elsewhere in Afghanistan in search of economic opportunity, often only for part of the year
- Men leave home to avoid conscription or harassment by armed groups
- Families or individuals take loans in order to migrate
- Men and boys migrate to Pakistan, Iran, or other countries, almost always illegally
- Men and boys enter indentured servitude relations to repay smugglers or debtors
- Families migrate temporarily due to insecurity
- Individuals and families migrate to access relief, water, or food

*Chanabad was the front line between the Taliban and the opposition. Those who were able to pay for their journeys migrated as soon as they were able. Those who were not able to pay remained in the village, caught in the crossfire. Both families and individual members of the community were always seeking to escape the village. This migration has a range of reasons, but the most important were to find jobs and run away from the war.*

*Man*  
*Chanabad District, Kunduz*

- Families move due to production failures, poverty, and lack of water
- Families enter IDP camps

*We were forced to migrate to other countries where our countrymen were ill treated. It is a pity to work hard in other countries and yet still be mistreated. If we could have security here, people would stay in Afghanistan, engage in productive activities and make this country prosperous.*

*Woman*

*First District, Herat, who lived in Iran for four years*

## Remittances

- Families receive remittances from sons and husbands working abroad, carried by individuals or sent by the *hawala* system
- Families receive money in installments from the traders

Inside Afghanistan, families that receive remittances are fortunate but this does not appear to be a reliable source of income. When received, remittances coming from different countries play an important role in the economic situation of Afghans population. Remittances are highly variable according to region within Afghanistan. In order of descending value from greatest to least remittances are generated from: a) Arab countries, b) Western countries, c) Iran, d) Eastern Europe and, lastly, d) Pakistan. The value and role of these remittances is not uniform but rather can be categorized into two groups:

*I sent two of my children to Saudi Arabia, and they send us remittances every six months. The money was carried by the Taliban traders, and the remittances helped us a lot.*

*Shopkeeper*

*Nahr-e-Sadie, Balkh*

1. The remittances from Western and Arab countries are used for survival strategies but also for investment and economic development purposes.
2. The remittances from Iran, Pakistan and Eastern Europe mainly are used for survival strategies, loan reimbursement and marriage expenses.

In the Arab countries, the primary objective of Afghan expatriates is to earn money to send back to their families in Afghanistan. They live in poor conditions, e.g. 4 – 5 people per room, in order to save on expenses and maximize cash flows back to Afghanistan. Kuwait is regarded as the most profitable destination for Afghan expatriates working in Arab countries.

Perhaps half of the Afghan expatriates living in Western countries are able to send remittances back to Afghanistan. Most Afghans in the West emigrated with their families, leaving few people behind in Afghanistan to whom to send money. Others are unable to earn enough money to both meet their expenses abroad and also send money home. An exception to this is London where some Afghan expatriates migrated individually as businessmen. After becoming successful, these men have sent money back to their families so that other family members can join them.

As with the Arab countries, Afghan expatriates in Iran are focused on earning money to send back as remittances rather than, as in the West, investing in a higher quality of life

in their adopted countries. In Iran, Afghan migrants provide a ready supply of cheap, hard working laborers that fills a niche in the Iranian labor market that cannot be met domestically. Afghans find jobs readily because they do not demand high salaries or insurance.

### Fuel Strategies

- Collecting dung and wood from compound and/or village area
- Increasing distance and time needed to find fuel
- Expanding family resources engaged in fuel collection
- Conserving fuel (heating and lighting fewer rooms, cooking less often)
- Buying fuel from the market
- Turning to new sources of fuel (stubble from fields, diesel, coal, wild bushes, plastic)
- Cutting wood from orchards and vineyards, including roots
- Cannibalizing shelter for fuel (pulling poles from the ceiling)
- Doing without fuel

*Everything became disastrous. We had to go a far distance to collect fuel, and people were killed by snakes, heat stroke, or landmines. We had to walk about six hours or more to find fuel.*

*Man  
Sakhi IDP Camp, Balkh*

### Qurbani

Families traditionally slaughter an animal and buy new clothes to commemorate the Qurbani Eid. Ideally, these animals are to be raised within the household. However, families are increasingly turning to the market for animals to slaughter or, for many in the surveys, doing without.

#### Sacrifice:

- Buying animals for sacrifice from market
- Combing with other families to purchase the sacrificial animal
- Sacrificing less essential animals (eg., goats or sheep as opposed to cows)
- Not making qurbani
- Buying a treat, such as candies, in place of sacrificing animals

*We have not made Qurbani, but there were some people who were able to do. They would send us meat. We could only afford to buy some candies to celebrate Eid.*

*Young girls  
Chahar Darah District,  
Kunduz*

#### Clothes:

- Buying used clothes
- Purchasing boys' clothes one year and girls' clothes the next
- Making clothes at home
- Doing without new clothes

### Relief

- Petition local authorities for assistance
- Send pack animals to distribution sites

- Seek access to humanitarian organizations (e.g., wait outside the gates of NGOs, travel great distances to deliver petitions to aid organizations clustered in urban areas)
- Bribe officials or local leaders in order to receive distributions
- Pay to be included on ration or distribution lists
- Send some household members to access relief
- Migrate to access relief (e.g., to IDP or refugee camps)

*WFP has distributed wheat and other goods. This helped us a lot, but it was not enough and only lasted a short period of time. There was a lot of corruption in distribution and monitoring, and there were many people in the village who did not receive any aid.*

*Young girls  
Nahr-e-Sadie, Balkh*

## Recommendations

These are interesting times in Afghanistan. Hope, fear and uncertainty pervade Afghan society. The Taliban are gone from power, bringing a modicum of freedom to many oppressed populations but also leading to new forms of personal and ethnic insecurity for others. The price of food has fallen as a result of optimism for a better future but currency instability has left the majority of households with crippling debt burdens while forcing small business, especially shopkeepers, out of business. Most households have received some form of humanitarian assistance, up from a small fraction of those receiving aid under the previous regime but the assistance has come far too late into the drought cycle to fundamentally alter deep food insecurity. There is hope for some form of stability, if not peace, for the first time in many years, even as robbery, murder and banditry increase on a daily basis.

### ***Recommendation One: Commit to a multi-year strategy of assistance of expanded relief and development assistance***

This report has attempted to detail the depth and complexity of food insecurity in Afghanistan. Its findings are humbling, revealing a profound national disaster of food insecurity that defies short-term or one-off solutions. Not enough has been done to alleviate suffering in Afghanistan, despite a remarkable mix of humanitarian, political and military efforts. A long-term commitment of generous, sustained and strategic relief and development interventions will be essential to addressing this “cash famine” and its attendant sufferings. This, clearly, must be the first recommendation that flows from this analysis: **the international community must commit to a multi-year strategy of assistance to Afghanistan at levels that exceed even current spending patterns.**

While much assistance has reached vulnerable households in Afghanistan, much more is needed. The depth and breadth of food insecurity documented in this report (and as was evidenced in focus group interview after focus group interview) indicates that it is likely that the UN *underestimated* food insecurity last year in both the levels of assistance it appealed for, as well as the determination of areas that could be classified as extremely vulnerable.

In order to cope with food insecurity, families have engaged in survival strategies borne out of extreme distress. Milk, meat, fruits and vegetables are gone from the Afghan diet. Assets that have taken years (if not generations) to accumulate have been sold, eaten, stolen, burned or have died. Families are so deeply indebted that they cannot access new loans or, in many cases, even face their neighbors. Short term relief efforts, including interventions to support purchasing power and targeted, sustained, generous and balanced emergency food relief rations will be vital for bridging the gap between deeper distress and a modicum of survivability. However, these interventions will not restore the resiliency of the Afghan populations to crisis. Development assistance that is focused on regenerating household capacity for coping with crises – natural, economic and political – is equally vital.

### ***Recommendation Two: Commit to a Strategy of Principled Humanitarian Engagement to Alleviate Food Insecurity in Afghanistan***

Humanitarian principles have long-guided relief organizations in the compromising environments that characterize conflict settings. Afghanistan should not be considered by relief workers to be “post-conflict” just yet; the dilemmas of relief in insecure settings continue to prevail in Afghanistan today. Three classical principles of humanitarian engagement (appropriate, impartial, accountable) relate to food security and should inform an immediate and longer-term philosophy of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. Appropriate aid is assessment, based aid, i.e., assistance that is provided based on alleviating the Afghan-specific threats to food insecurity, including the need for cash, roads and livestock, for example. Impartial assistance is needs-based aid, i.e., assistance flows first to those who need it most. This requires improved estimates of the national distribution of vulnerability to food insecurity as well as empowered mechanisms of authority to redirect relief resources and relief organizations to underserved areas. Accountable assistance is responsible aid, i.e., assistance is delivered to populations in a manner that it technically, financially and socially desirable.

#### **Principle One: Appropriate Assistance**

Relief interventions must be grounded in assessments of vulnerability. Based on the assessments conducted for this report, there are a series of sectoral interventions that flow naturally from the narrative of the focus group interviews and key informant discussions. As the drought persists, **emergency water interventions** need to be supported and implemented in a manner consistent with the SPHERE guidelines for technical specifications for implementation and maintenance of water interventions. (Please refer to <http://www.sphereproject.org/handbook/watsan.htm> for complete details of these standards.) Afghan authorities and humanitarian agencies are struggling to rationalize the coordination of water interventions. UNICEF historically has taken the lead in water sector coordination in disasters throughout the world, and its leadership, particularly in advocating for and assisting the most vulnerable to meet their household water consumption requirements, is needed in Afghanistan today. The importance of water has specific implications for the assistance community in Afghanistan. Some water

interventions, especially hand pumps, have had a significant and positive impact. Any intervention that requires water or influences the availability of water (e.g. water, livestock, agriculture, shelter, etc.) should be subject to basic questions of good program design, including winner and loser analysis (Who benefits from the project? Who is negatively affected) to ensure that the poor and the marginalized populations' ability to retain their control over access to water. Given the prevailing drought conditions, massive resettlement of returning refugee populations in some areas would appear premature and unsustainable. Any water-using intervention for any population should support a hierarchy of priorities for water consumption. In drought affected areas, for example, such a hierarchy might include:

1. Human consumption, health and hygiene requirements
2. Preservation and restoration of minimum asset bases: livestock, fruit trees and vineyards (especially among the food insecure) and shelter
3. Crops and seeds – after other priorities are satisfied or where there is adequate water for health and hygiene

There is an acute crisis of purchasing power. Having lost access to their own production, families turned to the market to meet their food needs, rapidly exhausting savings and then their assets to finance food purchases. Although strongly debt averse as a culture, the nation has gone deeply into debt to buy food. Each of these strategies has increased household vulnerability to food insecurity. A combination of interventions to increase purchasing at the household level and to stabilize market prices for staple commodities will directly alleviate household food insecurity.

- **Cash infusions**, including Cash for Work to both directly increase purchasing power as well as to promote the gradual repayment of old loans (and the restoration of vulnerable households "good credit" standing with new lenders), cash payment of salaries for civil workers and an aggressive use of private sector contracting in order to stimulate the demand for labor.
- **Microfinance**, possibly through private sector agriculture input suppliers, in order to assist heavily indebted households to regain access to their lands, water rights, orchards, vineyards and houses that are currently mortgaged in *garawei*.
- **Roads**, especially secondary/market/"feeder" roads to lower the cost of transportation and hence food commodities, but also rapid improvement to existing major road networks. The (labor-intensive) development of an all-weather road directly between Herat and Kabul through the Hazarajat will improve food security (as well as political integration) on the historically-neglected communities of the central highlands. The need for road repair and improvement highlights a potential role for private contractors as well as the US Army Corps of Engineers, who are still fondly remembered in Afghanistan for their earlier contributions to road construction in southern Afghanistan.
- **Monetization** of commercial maize is needed throughout Afghanistan to drive down the price of this essential food staple of the ultra-poor, as well as to increase

the availability and affordability of corn, a traditional livestock fodder input. Possibilities for fortifying corn in a manner suitable for both human and livestock should be explored.

- **Food Aid** for those vulnerable households that face transitory and chronic food insecurity but lack adequate surplus labor in the household to capitalize on other forms of humanitarian assistance, e.g. Cash For Work. Food aid programs need to be targeted, generous, balanced and sustained. For some of the most vulnerable, longer term dependency on food aid may be the best alternative to otherwise desperate survival strategies, e.g. forcing the pre-mature marriage of young girls, engaging in illicit activities, literally working to death, etc.
- **Agriculture, Livestock and Horticulture Programs – *a cow in every yard, a garden for every kitchen, a fruit tree for every kid.*** Agriculture, livestock and horticultural interventions are needed on both an emergency and longer-term basis, where there are adequate supplies of water to support them. The loss of family holdings of livestock, kitchen gardens, poultry stocks and backyard fruit trees has led directly to a critical loss of diversity in the Afghan diet. These need to be restored, house by house, village by village. The nomadic Koochi populations have lost their large livestock herds and face new forms of ethnic discrimination. A targeted program of pastoral livelihoods is needed to re-capacitate this important element of society that has the unique capacity of transform otherwise useless pastoral, range and mountain areas into goods important to the Afghan diet and economy – livestock. Cereal and cash crop farming, orchards and vineyards have been devastated by the drought and war and need to be restored through careful and sustainable interventions. Support for restoration of animal traction capacities is as important as seed and fertilizer interventions to restore crop production.
- **Fuel**, including the introduction of fuel conserving stoves, perhaps based on positive lessons learned from other drought-prone regions of the world, e.g. East Africa, as well as other promising technological innovations in the region, e.g. Pakistan.

Poor human health in Afghanistan is a result of poor water quality, a dearth of accessible, quality health care, limited immunization coverage, occupational risks, overwork and undernutrition, among other factors. Diarrheal diseases are seasonally problematic but will become more prevalent this summer as the drought persists, critically exacerbating micronutrient deficiencies. In the focus group interviews, respondents indicated a fairly good level of health education, linking clearly problems of diarrhea to poor water quality and insufficient hygiene, night blindness to a lack of vegetables, etc. Many public health problems may be more the result of a lack of resources rather than a lack of public awareness. Several preventable infectious diseases are endemic, e.g. measles, but vaccination coverage remains low, despite an impressive campaign of vaccination in recent months. **Sustained support for health interventions** is essential for countering immediate and longer-term threats to food insecurity.

**Principle Two: Impartial Assistance**

Humanitarian interventions need to be guided by assessments of relative vulnerability. Those most acutely in need must be assisted first, and must be assisted adequately. The humanitarian community in Afghanistan has demonstrated an impressive (and, these days, unusual) commitment to impartiality; the vast majority of interventions are informed by the pattern of vulnerability described by WFP's Vulnerability Assessment Map (VAM) compiled last summer. Unfortunately, the assessments underestimated both the nature and the distribution of needs in part because of limited capacity for data analysis but also because of the difficult operating environment as well as an arguable level of donor apathy and antipathy relating to political relations with the Taliban. Some highly vulnerable areas were not identified by the assessments and, as a result, they have not received adequate prioritization of assistance.

Security constraints, especially those emanating from landmines, will continue to hinder relief operations. Banditry and looting of relief assets are a problem in many areas. Relief organizations will continue to need to apply the many lessons learned from similar insecure complex emergency situations to minimize these risks. Should security concerns (or other capacity constraints) prevent relief organizations from fulfilling their commitments to working with specific communities, it is incumbent upon them to communicate these problems to authorities and donors. A level of transparent communication among actors about their actual capacity to operate in Afghanistan is essential for ensuring that committed relief reaches populations.

The UN agencies have particularly heavy responsibilities this year for improving the quality of national surveys and for conducting these assessments as a matter of the highest priority. Additional technical support from external sources (donors, universities, NGOs) may be needed to properly conduct and analyze the data generated by the surveys. FAO's Crop Establishment Survey is underway but may not be broad enough in scope to consider all questions relating to food security and agriculture and horticulture production, e.g., a planting survey (both of areas planted -- for harvest and water implications -- as well as areas not planted, an important indicator of water stress and possible migration flows), a orchards/vineyards (of remaining stock, who owns, kept alive at what cost?), a cereal supply assessment (of domestic production as well as market channels for commercial availability), a food accessibility assessment (of purchasing power, the role of debt and credit, market access issues, e.g. security and gender), etc. Livestock assessments are not planned until the fall but interventions are needed immediately. Livestock assessments are needed in order to establish a base of understanding regarding livestock health, fodder, water, origins, migration patterns, conflicts, etc.

WFP's VAM teams remain heavily engaged in helicopter-based rapid assessments. A team of VAM specialists needs to be dedicated solely to the task of firstly improving the survey tool from previous VAM exercises and secondly to undertaking the labor

intensive assessments. Logistical resources need to be prioritized for this work so that it can commence as soon as possible.

There is no nationwide model of health or food security assessment, surveillance and intervention in Afghanistan, although considerable effort is being invested in order to redress parts of this problem. NGOs and UN agencies are each working to implement their own models of food security but no single UN agency or NGO is adequately equipped to manage the task of food security surveillance in Afghanistan (e.g. to consider political, climatic and economic risks and to recommend interventions beyond the mandate of the UN specialized agencies or a single NGO). Each system, by itself, is viable for each agency's project purposes but the individual systems are not being coordinate for nationwide food security surveillance. Even within the context of individual agency mandate, these systems are challenged both technically and logistically; the vast resources that have come into Afghanistan in a short period of time have overwhelmed the existing information systems.

This situation is due in large part to the historical challenges of operating in Afghanistan. Two decades of war and, more recently, several years of international isolation, has limited donor investment, NGO capacity and UN leadership for the development of an effective nationwide food security surveillance system. In addition, the Afghan Interim Authority lacks the capacity and the political support to enforce meaningful coordination. Instead, interim authorities are challenged by the fragmented government systems they inherited and are handicapped by a wary humanitarian community that has grown accustomed to not cooperating with Afghan authority.

UNICEF and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have initiated a series of rapid nutrition, mortality and morbidity surveys of women, infants and children that will help to rationalize targeting of assistance and also contribute to the establishment of baseline nutritional data. These are longer-term endeavors, however, and donors would be advised not to count heavily on/pressure the UN and NGOs for nutrition data but rather instead to demonstrate restraint in demanding this type of information until the systems mature.

In addition to generating quality information, the second requirement for achieving impartiality in Afghanistan rests on the existence of an empowered entity to direct relief efforts to those areas identified as being most in need. Currently, neither the AIA, the UN nor donor organizations have asserted this responsibility. The longer term solution is clearly to capacitate Afghan authorities for effective national disaster surveillance and management. Current and future governments of Afghanistan need to be deliberately capacitated to conduct famine early warning, assessment and analysis for a range of hazards that characterize Afghanistan: conflict, drought, snows, earthquake, avalanches and floods. In the interim, a greater involvement by donors like USAID, working with the AIA and the UN, will be needed in order to rationalize humanitarian responses in country. As is typical of emergencies, there will be tensions between the need to provide timely information now and the need to support the development of more sustainable information systems. Given the immaturity of the humanitarian community's

information and surveillance systems, however, this may be a false distinction. Some system is going to have to be substantially capacitated: the donors face a choice in deciding whether it will be the interim/future government, the humanitarian community or both.

### **Principle Three: Accountable Assistance**

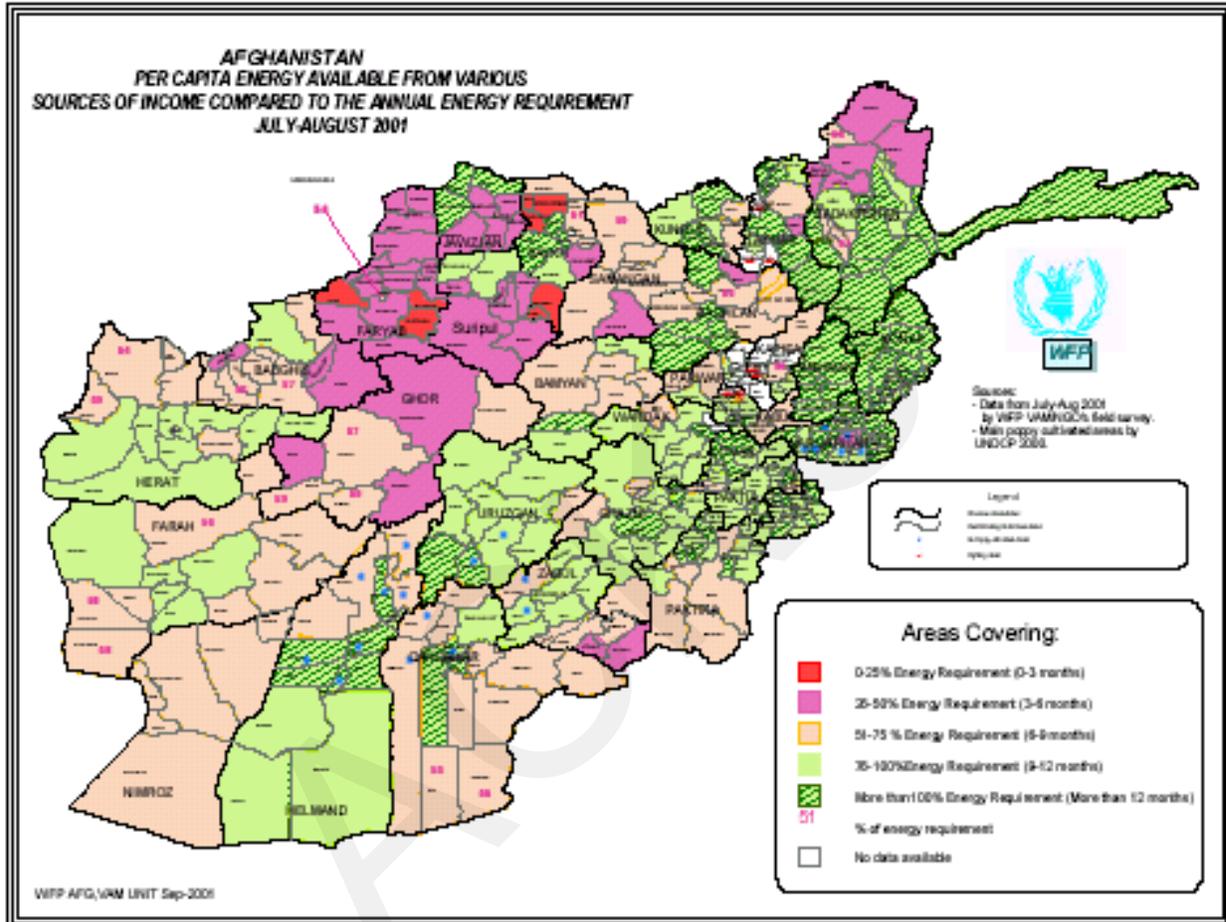
A great deal of resources has poured into Afghanistan in recent months. Monitoring and evaluation efforts have not kept pace with operations. There is a strong need for technical, fiscal and social monitoring and evaluation of relief interventions. This is particularly true of organizations holding large grants, as well as organizations with responsibility for managing umbrella grant mechanisms with large numbers of implementing partners. If organizations require additional resources to adequately monitor their programs, such requests should be supported. In addition, it is important to broaden out sources of information regarding the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. Project-based implementing agency reporting should be augmented by continued support for independent monitoring and evaluation efforts.

The inability for USAID staff to move freely throughout Afghanistan has crippled the capacity of the agency to monitor its own projects. There is no substitute for the presence of the donor in the field to encourage responsible programming. USAID staff must be able to monitor USAID projects in order to improve technical performance and financial accountability, as well as to rationalize the distribution of relief resources (in conjunction with local authorities), and to identify and support areas in need of additional assistance.

Other donors, especially the European Union, have established effective mechanisms for monitoring projects, primarily through the use of a network of trained Afghan professionals. Increased coordination among donor agencies is needed to rationalize program strategies and the distribution of humanitarian resources.

Capacitating Afghan authorities at all levels to have both the technical skills and the political empowerment necessary to engage in constructive monitoring of relief operations is a worthy and necessary long term development challenge. This will require coordination across a range of ministries, as well as support for “good humanitarian governance” from the capital to the sub-provincial levels. Both technical training and material support will be needed (transportation assets, communication supplies and staff salaries, especially). NGO and UN organizations need to commit to working with authorities to ensure that the systems that are developed are appropriately respected by humanitarians throughout Afghanistan.

# Annex I. WFP Vulnerability Assessment Map



## Annex II. Select Bibliography

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