PRE-SURVEY for ASAR
Jaghoori District
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Kathryn Kaldor
Female Program Supervisor
Austrian Relief Committee - Assistance to Skilled Afghan Refugees
INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1989, the ASAR project held discussions with three teams of ARC agricultural field officers operating projects in Logar, Kandahar and Ghazni provinces in Afghanistan. ASAR was interested in surveying the areas to offer assistance to skilled and needy people who might benefit from receiving tools to work in their communities. All of the teams thought that the local people would welcome such a survey, but Logar and Kandahar provinces would not allow their women to be assisted. Only the field officers from Jaghoori district in Ghazni invited ASAR to survey both men and women.

Because working with Afghan women is one of the most sensitive topics around Peshawar, next to political discussions, we further questioned the field officers about their invitation. Were they sure it would be acceptable for ASAR to survey women in Jaghoori? The answer still came back in the affirmative. Along with it came an explanation: "You see, our women are different. They are educated. They are free. They work in the fields."

In its relative context, these things are true. For a woman to be labeled as educated in Jaghoori means she has completed perhaps the fourth grade. In our western societies, the status of this accomplishment may be equivalent to graduating from high school. If a woman has completed the eighth class or tenth class, her status might be equal to that of a masters or doctorate in the west.

In Afghanistan, most women are kept within the confines of their homes and walled compounds where they are responsible for the daily operation of the household and care of the animals. They are not to be seen by people outside their family, because it is imagined to be disrespectful to them and dishonor the family.

However, there are variances from tribe to tribe, and the Hazaras do not adhere so fastly to this restrictive code. They do indeed hold their women in a special place and keep quite tight reins on their movements, but they are allowed to work in the fields and do other work as needed outside of the home.

THE JOURNEY

9 JUNE 1989

We arrive in Quetta and stay in a community of Hazaras, people who have faces marked with strong Mongolian features. They are a tribe that is most visible and consistently despised by the Pashtuns, for a variety of reasons. Some theorize that the disdain stretches back to the era of Changhaz Khan and their Mongol ancestors who pillaged and ravaged the countryside. Revenge is a tribal code of Pashtuns and even age-old conflicts
are not forgotten if the score between the groups is not yet equaled.

There is a village of about 2,000 to 3,000 families of Hazaras nestled into the side of a rock mountain on the edge of Quetta and on the edge of the desert. Most of them moved here about 20 years ago as 'economic refugees'. 'They had no land,' Hakim (an agricultural field officer of ARC) tells us. 'Even recent refugees' he says, 'are economic ones.' Perhaps to explain, as he brings out lunch one day he sets down a plate of watermelon and some bread and says, 'Some farmers eat only this.'

10 JUNE 1989

The agricultural team leader from Jaghoori turns up in Quetta tonight to inform us that the fighting in Sang-e-Masha bazaar between the Hezbi and the Nasr parties lasted only one day. It is the largest bazaar in Jaghoori and houses each of the parties local headquarters. The Nasr party is backed by Iran, and the Hezbi party has its main headquarters in Peshawar. The only fighting that occurs in the area is between the parties as they attempt to show power and gain control from the each other. The local people suspect that the fighting is instigated in part by Khad (State Information Service) in efforts to disrupt any possibility of alliance, and thus strength.

In March, as we made plans for the survey, we asked the agricultural field officers who live and work in Jaghoori to inform us of any fighting in the area. One week ago when they came to Peshawar to get us, there had been no fighting. When the fighting occurred, the team leader came to tell us about it because he didn't want us to think he had not been telling us the truth.

11 JUNE 1989

As we wait for the jeep to be repaired and our journey to begin, Hakim begins to tell us about life in Jaghoori, beginning with the educational problems. Hakim tells us that when their agricultural team went to do a pre-survey, the people told them, 'We don't want your agriculture. Give us schools.'

He said that last year when a Christian missionary group went to Jaghoori they were told by the people, 'The only help we want from you is to finance our schools.' The group took pictures and made promises. However, they are still waiting.

The Iranian party which for a few years was supporting schools has now stopped their support because of lack of funds. For awhile after that, shopkeepers of the local community were collecting money, but it was only enough to keep the schools open for two months.
The schools that existed before the war were government supported, but now, because there is no government, there are no taxes. There are no community services such as water, phones or electricity. There are a few roads whose maintenance is done by local people who then collect money from passing motorists to pay for their labor.

Hakim tells us that adequate health care facilities are also lacking in the Jaghoori district, although a large 65 bed hospital financed by Inter-Aid is under construction near the main bazaar of Sang-e-Masha. At present, two small clinics are open, but neither has staffing appropriate to operate them fully.

A clinic built in 1982 by MSF (Medicine Sans Frontier) has an operation theater and a generator to run it but has no surgeon. It has been beset by problems with the local parties since its opening. The parties have wanted to ‘provide security’ for it, in essence take credit for its existence and control it. The foreign agencies staffing the clinic have changed three times in seven years because of the conflicts and ensuing threats. As a result, what has the potential to be a well-run clinic is crippled by political conflict.

The other clinic is operated by the Swedish Committee and has faced less problems with the parties.

Neither of the clinics employ female staff. Because the local people consider it improper for their women to be seen by a male attendant, any women in the community who becomes seriously ill must go to Quetta for medical assistance. Apart from being a difficult journey when in the best of health, the expense incurred is significant.

12 JUNE 1989

We leave Quetta. The road continues progressively to disintegrate. The way is through the desert. Tracks weave over sand banks of dry powdery earth, sometimes a foot deep. Trucks get stuck. Often the ‘road’ is a salty dry river bed. Since the war, it seems like there has been no maintenance. During brief periods of fighting, passage was dangerous and they were not used. In the winter they are impassable due to snow and in the spring they are impassable due to mud.

All the jarring and bumping wrecks havoc with the vehicles and tires. Breakdowns are frequent. There are no services. A driver must be self-maintained mechanically. There are also essentially no ‘hotels’. The infrequent ones that do exist are mud buildings with a series of small unfurnished rooms for sleeping. Tea and bread are available. If one is lucky a greasy broth and some meat bones are available. Sometimes there are a few eggs.
No one complains. Though the way is very rough, it is an improvement from the time when no road at all existed. In those days the journey took seven days by foot.

Because the road is unmapped and the places are desolate, the way is impossible to find without an experienced driver. The only people we see are nomads living in low-stretched tents with their herds of goats and sheep.

There is also talk of thieves. When we arrive at Cherma, the last village post in Pakistan, we find over 200 people waiting. No vehicles have arrived from Afghanistan for four days. Everyone is waiting for them to find out how the way is and if there is danger.

That night the traffic arrives. By mid-day, the Mujahedeen have organized the people to travel in a caravan. They charge a fee for protection and safe passage. There are four large trucks packed with people in the back like cattle and a few jeeps with people hanging off the sides and sitting on the roof. We join them in our own jeep, but after ten hours we leave them because seven of those hours have already been spent waiting as tire punctures occur and need to be repaired.

13 JUNE 1989

It is the middle of the night and we have been driving for 12 hours from Cherma through an endless desert. Hakim suddenly turns and with a beaming face says, 'The wheat is growing!' Sure enough, there are wheat fields next to the road. We have come to Mokur, the first town of any size since leaving Quetta.

As we enter Mokur, we see by the headlights a man with a gun standing in the middle of the road. He yells and stops us. He is a Mujahedeen, one of several who roam the streets at night to protect the town. Once he is assured that we are only travellers he insists that we stay the night because there are thieves on the way we are going. We are brought to a quiet, clean mosque where we spend the night.

14 JUNE 1989

The journey starts again and within a half hour we have crossed the Kabul-Kandahar highway. It is the first paved road since leaving Quetta. It too is in disrepair from tanks rolling across it. Crossing over this road and turning to enter the mountains, we leave behind the Pashtuns with their beards and turbans and guns and enter into Hazara lands. The difference is immediate. I suddenly realize what nonsense it is to clump all the people from Afghanistan into one category. They are distinct cultures that have little in common with each other, other than their
devotion to Islam. They are extremely tribal in their nature in the sense that they do not mix with those outside their tribe, nor do they have much desire to. Conflicts are frequent. Racism is blatant.

The road is a dirt track again, leading into a valley. Hakim points to the side of a mountain rising up from the edge of the road and says, 'This is where I spent one year fighting.' Being the access point to the valleys beyond, the people fought here to keep back the regime forces from entering their lands and villages. 'When the soldiers left, I put down my gun.', he says.

15 JUNE 1989

We arrive in Jaghoori after a 520 kilometer journey from Quetta that took 28 hours to drive.

The land around the village is green. A river flows through the valley and irrigated canals have made agriculture possible. There are orchards and wheat fields, vegetable gardens, clover and flowers. Apricots, peaches, walnuts, mulberries and apples are all beginning to grow. The women are busy cutting clover and hay for the animals.

Hakim tells us it is a hand to mouth existence though the place seems rich and fertile. Those without land, of whom there are many, have nothing. Many have moved away as economic refugees to Iran or Pakistan where they try to make money for a year or two. Afterwards, they come back and are able to live for another six months. There are no jobs. A few work on others land. Prices have risen since the war because the roads to the major cities, like Kabul or Kandahar, are often blocked by troops or Mujahedin. No one wants to deliver or transport goods. Raw materials and basic goods are expensive.

Hakim says that in 1979 the soldiers came to this area and fought for twelve days and twelve nights. After that, they were all dead or had left. The people then went to fight on the mountain slope, near the main road where access to the valleys begins, to prevent the soldiers from returning to their area.

Two years later political parties moved in to 'assist' the locals. Since then the only fighting has been between them. The local people have asked them to leave as they have come to realize that they are not there to help so much as to have some power. However, they do not leave and cannot be persuaded to.

16 JUNE 1989

Hakim ushers us to his home taking us through the orchards and fields near the river. It is beautiful and peaceful especially after the long journey through desert lands.
In the evening we go to another home for dinner. The invitation has been extended by a neighbor and we enter a room to find a gathering of fifteen or so men waiting for us. Though the atmosphere is social it actually has an entirely different function: We are there to be introduced to the people, to answer the question of why a foreign woman and a Pashtun-Sunni man are in their village. (Hazaras people are of the Shia branch of Islam. Historically there is an animosity between Shias and Sunnis as well as between Hazaras and Pashtuns.)

In this culture of Shuras and Jirgas (the local governing bodies), speaking is an art learned early on. It is a means of gaining and retaining power and authority. This group gathered together was as such. The cast of characters present seemed to represent a cross-section of the village, carefully selected. The culture is one operated under certain guidelines, unions of families, distinctions of classes and inherited power and influence. Some people were silent the whole time. A few of them spoke a lot. It reflected their place in the group. They approve or disapprove of outsiders. They discuss what is good and needed for their community. We are obliged to meet with them, answer their questions and befriend them to give them a chance to decide if they want us to work with them.

Once our work was carefully explained and they understood our intent, we were welcomed and assured of full cooperation.

THE SURVEY

There are many villages in the valleys and mountains in Jaghoori. Because we are limited in how many people we can assistance we choose to survey only about 20 villages, by which assistance would be given to an average of 6 people in each. We explained that we were there to help the most needy. In addition we wanted to assist a few workers in the bazaar who were in need of more specialized equipment that was not available but would benefit the entire community. Aside from these special cases, the people eventually referred to us fell into three general categories.

THOSE WITHOUT LAND

Most of the villages we surveyed are within two hours of driving from Sang-e-Masha, the largest central bazaar in the area. The villages themselves generally don’t have shops or even central places. Most of them are rather spread out, with houses separated by landholdings.

Where there is water, the land is green. Every parcel of land that is irrigated is utilized. But whether the land be green or barren, it is claimed as property by someone. Often the ownership goes back several generations. Usually the ownership
is disputed. Farmers will fight and kill each other disputing the ownership of a rocky, apparently useless mountaintop. To them it is a matter of honor and power.

Generally where there is someone or something to govern or control here, there is fighting. This is the tribal nature of the people and acceptable in their sense of rights of defence.

In many of the villages we are given names of people to survey who are not landowners. We have made it clear that we are there to assist only the poorest. We have let the people give us names of whom they consider to be the poorest in their communities and they have mostly chosen those without land, without houses and without animals, since the ability to survive here is linked to being able to feed oneself.

Wealthy landowners called khans control most of the countryside. The system is a feudal one and the fields are tended by families of tenants who usually receive a small portion of the crop and a place to live in exchange for their labor. Many of them are in deep debt and in their lifetime will never have the opportunity to repay what they owe. Their 'income' is only enough to sustain them and not enough to save from. These debtors' children will inherit the debt upon their parents' death and the system will be perpetuated.

For most of the people in this situation that we surveyed, we either decided to assist the man with tools, if he had a reasonable skill, or to assist the family with animals, via the woman, so at least they would have dairy products to supplement the meager diets of themselves and their children.

Animal husbandry is a common way to make up for the insufficient land available to adequately support the people. Most households have a few goats, sheep, or a cow. Their by-products are consumed daily for food. The raw materials, such as wool and leather, are either sold or traded or used for household purposes.

INTERNAL REFUGEES

There is another large landless population living in Jaghoori district. They are refugees from other provinces who have come to live there between the last one to three years.

One of the groups is from Bamiyan Province. They had left their village five years before because of fighting that had been going on for two years between rival factions of the Mujahedin. The physical danger was not only great, which made it difficult for them to carry on their daily tasks in the fields, but also, the Mujahedin had taken to stealing from the local people. Eventually, the entire village packed up and left. They had
lived in another district for two to three years and then came to Jaghoori.

The second group of refugees was from the Dai Mardah tribe. They arrived in Jaghoori two years ago, leaving their lands because of famine. They were unable to support themselves. Life became too difficult and they chose to migrate to another area in hopes of a better situation.

As lists of names were given for us to survey these internal refugees were included as a priority since they are being supported by the local people. All of them are living with someone who has been generous enough to offer them a room. A few of the men work as laborers at whatever jobs they can find. Most of the women are skilled kelim-weavers but do not have the tools or raw materials work. By helping these people with tools to support themselves, the local community will also benefit as the strain on their personal resources is lessened as they become self-sufficient.

FAMILIES OF MARTYRS

The third category of those surveyed who were presented to us by the local people as 'those most in need of assistance' were families who had lost members in war efforts (usually males), or had men who are currently Mujahedin. Most of these families were living around a village called Loman where there had been an active government post until two years ago. It was the only area in the district that had been mined in efforts to protect the post and distress the villagers.

To Muslims, there is great honor in fighting for the Jihad, which is a war deemed to be holy to protect and uplift the teachings of their Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him). There is probably no greater honor for a devout Muslim than to die in such a battle. Families of these martyrs receive a special place in the community because of the great sacrifice of their member and loss incurred. They died fighting for Islam. The same is true for a family who has a man who is a Mujahedin. He is out defending Islam and is not able to support his family. There is an obligation in the community to compensate for the loss and to commend the sacrifice by taking care of the family.

Though there may have been other people in Loman who were poorer, it was more important for the local people to assist these families of martyrs and Mujahedin. As introductions were made during the survey, people were introduced as 'So and so, mother of shaheed (martyr), or wife of shaheed, or father of shaheed,' etc. It is a title which delegates a certain standing in the community and is regarded with respect.
RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

All in all 57 women were surveyed, of whom 56 were accepted for assistance. About half of them will receive animals to support their families and most of the rest will receive tools for kelim-weaving. A few will receive sewing machines.

Approximately 105 men were surveyed, of whom 73 were accepted for assistance. The skills are various and mostly related to business that could be operated in the bazaar.

The distribution is planned for October when tools for most of the men's skills will be purchased in Pakistan and delivered to Jagoori if no difficulties arise in transporting the goods. The animals and wool for the kelim weavers will be purchased locally and distributed. Field officers will return at the same time to conduct the distribution. Monitoring activities will be carried on at a later date to check progress and use of tools by the beneficiaries as well as to determine the need for extended assistance in the future.

It was observed during the survey that some of the more specialized skills, such as carpet and kelim weaving, could be encouraged if more extensive assistance was made available to them to enable them to set up small production units. By this they could not only carry on their work in a larger capacity, but also offer training to others and thereby preserve a dying craft.