Community Description
Resources, Problems and Plan

Robat Village
Deihak District
Ghazni Province
Afghanistan

an independent study
by Jane Thomas, 1991-3
Rabat Village,
Deihad District, Ghazni Province, Afghanistan


By: Jane Thomas, Consultant        GPO Box 1289, Peshawar,
                                          Pakistan        tel: 42764

In Co-operation with:-Eng. Abdullah Shamimi, of BCURA (Baz
Construction Unit for Reconstruction of
Afghanistan, an Afghan NGO.)

and

-Deihak District shura members:
  -Maulavi Aktar Mohammed
  -Gul Ahmed
  -Jandod
  -Maulavi Sher Mohammed
  -Yar Mohammed

This is a community analysis looking at both sides of the story: problems/needs and what the community already has (resources). The idea is to find resources within the community that the community can put to better use to help solve the problems or fill the needs. This reduces the need for outside help and encourages self-reliance. It should show funders and NGOs how to help without over-helping.

This balanced way of doing a survey is adapted for Afghanistan by the consultant from the Harvard Relief/Development Project book, "Rising from the Ashes: Development Strategies in Times of Disaster", by Mary Anderson and Peter Woodrow, Westview and UNESCO Press, 1989. (Copy in ACBAR/ARIC collection).

A whole community can participate together to do this kind of study on itself. Participation in this study is described on page 18. For techniques, please contact the consultant.

Survey Results: (Oct.-Nov.1991): pages 2-16
Plan: page 17
Consultant’s Follow-up Report (5 months later:April 92): pg.18
Consultant’s Follow-up Report (1 year later: Jan.93): pg.21
Community Description

Rabat Village, Deihak District, Ghazni Province, Afghanistan

1. LOCATION: about 125 km. south of Kabul, 35 Km. east of Ghazni city and 35 km. west of Gardez city, Paktia province

2. DEFINITION OF THIS COMMUNITY: (see maps)
Locally, people think of Rabat community as the village, the mountain-sides on the north and the valley of undeveloped land that extends 7 km. to the south (marked in map #2). The shura controls this area.

3. CLIMATE:
-2,300 m. above sea level (highest surrounding peaks are from 2,500 to 2,600 m.)
-summer max. temperature 30 degrees celcius, winter daily average about 10 to 12 degrees.
-high rainfall,
-snow on mountains for 5 months, in village for only 1 or two weeks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;POSITIVES&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;NEGATIVES&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;STRENGTHS&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;WEAKNESSES&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;RESOURCES/HAVES&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;PROBLEMS/&quot;NEEDS&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;CAPACITIES&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;VULNERABILITIES&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. POPULATION
-1,500 families or 7,000 people live here. Over 80% fled as refugees to nearby villages during the years of heavy bombardment (1982-89) but almost all have returned since 1990.

| A few families (15-20) are still in a refugee camp (Miranshah) in Pakistan. |

-Of the 63 villages in Deihak district, Rabat village has the largest population.
-It is the social and economic centre of the district.

| There still is a seasonal decline in the population, due to men going away to work (see Employment #11). |

5. ETHNIC/TRIBAL
Rabat is mixed Pushtoon and Tajik
6. DESTRUCTION
- Despite heavy aerial bombardment, a relatively low rate of destruction occurred. Only about 40 houses were destroyed. These families are living with others in Rabat.

- In 10 or 12 of these houses, 500 kg. bombs lodged themselves without exploding. Rabat men dismantled them for scrap iron, relocated explosive part then detonated it. Twice the explosions created new resources; a seam of coal previously unknown (see Natural Resources) and a new spring of water.

No reconstruction has occurred yet as the people affected are too poor.

7. LANDMINES
- There are believed to be no landmines in this area.

8. SECURITY (Internal and External)
- There are no serious problems between Mujahideen groups here. No fighting.

- Four Muj parties are present; Hezb-i-Islami, Ittehad, Mahaz and Jamiat. Shura members are from these parties. Only one (Mahaz) has an office in Rabat in the only school building. (see Education #16).

- Villagers treat incoming cannon shells or rocket casings as "income". They compete over the metal, sometimes while still hot, to sell as scrap metal.

But the Kabul regime continues to shell the village several times per day (BM-41s located 16 km. away to south west). Not much new damage occurring.

Government shelling may be in retaliation for Muj. base camps located 5-6 km. north of village.

Early in the war 200 to 300 people were killed in aerial bombardments and Russian soldiers in person killed 250 in the village.
9. ECONOMY

Rabat people have always been extremely poor, subsistence farmers. Most of the income goes to buy food. Now, most income comes from men who go away to work in fruit growing. (see Employment).

Income in the village has historically come from:

- **firewood brush**: is collected off the mountain-sides and the large piece of undeveloped land to the south. Sold in Ghazni city. This activity has started again since 1990.

- **dried fruit**: mulberries, apricots, etc. Started again since 1990.

- **white mud or clay**: for finishing interior walls. Two major deposits exist. Started mining again since 1990.

- **bushes for medicinal purposes**. Sold in bazaars in Ghazni city, Kabul and Pakistan. Started again since 1990.

- **"taktal sang"**: a kind of stone with high heat retention. 4-5 cm. thick, it is used in floors heated from below. Stone keeps room warm longer. Abundant supply. Excavation and sales starting again since 1990.

- **Carpet Making**

  - In the past, carpet making was a major activity of women and an important source of family income.

  But even before the war problems developed with the quality of carpets, reducing incomes. Problems were poor materials and equipment and lack of knowledge by many on how to do best quality.

Historically, carpets here were made from silk (purchased at high cost in Kabul) with some wool (bought from
POSITIVES

-Carpets sold in Ghazni city, Kabul and Pakistan.

NEGATIVES

Rabat villagers but there never has been many sheep). Later many women started using mixtures of synthetics and completely unsuitable plant matter. Equipment now is very crude (i.e. can’t afford spinning wheels or strong frame looms), resulting in carpets with poor appearance and strength.

But there were problems with marketing: traders taking advantage of the situation. They gave a price below even the worth of a sub-standard rug. This has perpetuated the low income cycle. A carpet maker can put into a new carpet only the money received from the last one.

-During the war, while families were refugeed, carpet activity reduced and quality declined even further.

-In 1990, BCURA (see Outside Help #22) conducted a house to house survey and found 110 women who are from families who historically made carpets and remember how to do it. A few have continued during the war. A few have great expertise and can teach or re-teach the other women. Knowledge on how to produce silk from the cocoon stage also exists.

-The whole village has agreed that carpet-making is the number one problem and is the community’s top priority to solve (see Plan #25).

Silk used in the carpets in earlier days came in the cocoon form from Kabul, China and Pakistan. Villagers made it into thread and dyed it. Sometimes the finished thread was bought but it was very expensive.
POSITIVES

-Later in this study, it was discovered that Rabat may have high potential as a silk producing community as great numbers of mulberry trees are present. (see #12(d) Agriculture/ Mulberry Trees).

-There is strong interest for the women to start a "syndicate", to produce and market the carpets jointly with shared profits.

-Embroidery: pre-war, the women of Rabat also made income from embroidery. Sold in Kabul to tourists and traders who exported to Germany, France, Italy and other countries.

NEGATIVES

10. Natural Resources:

-several already mentioned above: medicinal and fire-wood bushes, white mud, tarkhtal sang

-Coal: bombardments opened deposits of coal not known previously to exist here. These are large solid deposits but the type of coal has not been identified. BCURA has warned village people not to dig because poisonous gases may be present. BCURA intends to send the coal for testing.

-Gems: some gems are known to exist here but the quality and quantity is unknown. They have never been explored. Known to exist are: rubies, topaz, tormaleen and maybe emeralds.

-Marble and "Akhat": (a
green building stone)

**POSITIVES**

- Sand and other stone:
- Fruit trees:
  - 80,000! mulberry trees
  - apple, apricot, etc.
- Fairly abundant spring water
  (See Water #12(c))
- 10 to 12 hours of direct sunlight daily. (Whereas, many other local villages are located on the shade side of the mountains and receive little direct sun).

**NEGATIVES**

11. Employment:
- Rabat has many skilled labourers, especially in fruit growing
  But they go elsewhere to work (Maiden, Kabul, Parwan, Kunduz and Paktia) to work in the orchards of traders who export the fruit to Pakistan and India. Orchards are not developed at Rabat although there is excellent potential to do so.

- a large number of young unemployed men hang around Rabat, gambling, smoking hashish and sometimes making trouble. Village people, elders and the shura register strong concern about this.

12. AGRICULTURE:

Several factors combined suggest that Rabat has a very large potential for generating income from agriculture. It has good land, skilled labour, and water but all are very under-used.

- a) Land: Rabat has a huge piece of un-developed land: 10,000 But only about 15 hectares are under
to 15,000 hectares running south of the village for

**POSITIVES**

7 km. It is flat and has sandy top-soil, not stone covered like is common. Each family owns part of this land (see Land Ownership #13). The only growth on this land now is scrub brush collected as firewood. The land is located between two "washes" or water drainage courses. To develop this land, water exploration and management is necessary. This is of high priority to the community (see Plan).

- **b)** **Cash crops:** mulberries, apricots, apples, grapes and nuts

- **c)** **Water:** Rabat has heavy (but unmeasured) rainfall and some amount of snow melt.

  - there are two karez
  
  - The one working originates in the following big spring...
  
  - There are a few springs but one has the largest out-put in the area, (50 litres per second). It is located close (200-300 m. to the village.
  
  - This also serves as the drinking water supply which seems quite well protected by a stone retainer wall where water exits the tunnel. It keeps animals away. Watering animals and washing clothes occurs at another pool 20-30 m. away.

  - Also driven by this water source is a

  cultivation: by 60-70 families growing

**NEGATIVES**

kitchen gardens and and 100-200 fruit trees each.

Still, it is subsistence farming. Most families spend what little money they make on food grown elsewhere. But the diet is extremely poor; bread, tea, onions and rice are the normal diet.

One of these karez had dried-up (cause unspecified).
wheat grinding mill, functioning now.
- Two short irrigation

**POSITIVES**

channels are fed by this spring. They run directly below the village, one on each side of the east wash.
- Two gravelly "washes" start at higher elevation, extend through the community and southward on either side of the large piece of undeveloped land. It’s through here that all the water rushes away uncontrolled.
- Output of the west wash is estimated at 2 cubic metres per second, for 2 months only in the spring.
- Before the war, the Ministry of Irrigation in Kabul discovered an aquafer (underground river) running between Rabat’s two washes at a 70 m. depth but it was never explored. It’s exact location is not known but the data is on record in Kabul.
- Villagers believe that their water problems can be solved by constructing a small dam and reservoir and drilling 2 or 3 deep wells into the aquafer.

**NEGATIVES**

Cost of drilling is unaffordable by villagers: est. at 1,000 rp./m including pipe, 70,000 rp. ($2,800) per well

---

-d) Mullberry Trees:
- Rabat has a very high number of mullberry trees at first estimated by villagers at 50,000.

For unexplainable reasons, BCURA, the shura or villagers did not know about the connection between mullberry trees and growing silk. While
-It is unrecorded how much of the mulberry fruit is used or sold. BCRUA reports needing silk for carpets, they have not known about using their trees to raise

**POSITIVES**

in 1990, some of these trees were being cut to replace them with apple trees as they fetch a higher price. Shura members say the cutting was only of old, hollow ones. As there is a local scarcity of trees, BCRUA asked that the cutting stop so the shura made the cutters stop.

-When the consultant told the shura about 2 places in Faryab and Badghis using their trees to feed silk worms, they were extremely eager to know more. They decided to assign some of the young unemployed trouble-makers to survey the mulberry trees, count them and note condition.

-The young men did so and the count came in even higher, 80,000! (far more than needed for their own supply. This might be a whole new industry for Rabat).

**NEGATIVES**

-A severe problem exists with mice, insects and "jarya" (kind of porcupine?) These problems started about 3 years ago. -Villagers do not know how to stop these problems. This is ranked the second from top priority problem

**Pests:**

e)
POSITIVES

f) Farm Power:
-the shortage of oxen is not considered major problem by BCRUA or the shura as people find other ways to plough using donkeys, other livestock or dig by hand.

-Rabat does not want tractors because "existing fields are too small and tractors take jobs from people".

g)Livestock:

-every family has a few chickens.

NEGATIVES

-there is a great shortage of oxen. A couple of years ago a political party brought 40 oxen but 30 died on the way. The other 10 were eaten.

-there is a strong shortage of livestock. There are more sheep than cows but more cows are needed for milk, yoghurt and oil.

13. LANDOWNERSHIP:
-Each family in Rabat owns a piece of the large, undeveloped land. This ownership came about in the pre-communist land reform programme of 1975. The shura and BCRUA report there are no problems with this ownership. The head of BCRUA, Eng. Shamimi and his family was one of the original owners who had 1,000 ha. confiscated in this programme.
-Developing the land would benefit every family.

14. Forestry:

Little information has been documented about these trees,
-at least those remaining trees are being protected due to BCURA's influence.

**POSITIVES**

only that very few are left. They are on the mountain side.

**NEGATIVES**

15. Health:

-For males there are 3 male health workers present in the village who were trained in Peshawar.

-A foreign NGO started building a clinic but left when the Gulf war started. About 1 m. of wall had been constructed.

Health conditions are known to be very poor, especially for women. There are no health workers for women.

Information on vaccinations of children is not known.

-There are no doctors, clinics or other facilities.

-construction abandoned.

16. EDUCATION:

-BCRUA estimates about 99% illiteracy rate now.

-Before the war one school operated for boys only (400 students at a time). It is still standing, a very sturdy stone structure.

-This school has been closed for many years. It is used as a party office by Mahaz.

-3 madrassas now exist, including one for Mujahideen which is a literacy programme.

-There has never been a school for girls.

-a few boys have had higher education in Kabul

-but these boys have not returned to the village.

-"School" is an extremely "hot" subject in Rabat. Because of history
with this one school run by the communist government, the shura positively does not

POSITIVES

NEGATIVES

want a school. This is such a controversial subject that BCURA warns against even mentioning it.

17. Transportation/Communications

- Decent road access exists between Rabat and the outside. Truckes, cars and buses come and go.
- Rabat is about 6 km. away from the new Angorada to Bamyan road being built by UNDP.
- there is a wireless radio in the village

But roads to Kabul and Pakistan are totally closed by snow in winter.

This will not change with the new UNDP road.

18. WOMEN:

-Like all rural women, Rabat women are extremely hard workers; bringing the fire wood and water, cooking, harvesting crops, looking after the children and making carpets. Several women in one family share these duties.

Health conditions are very poor. There are no trained birth attendants or any health workers for women. There has never been any formal education for females. Women remain isolated from each other.

19. History: no history has been recorded yet.

20. Other: -there are 18 mosques in Rabat; important community centres for men.

-more information needs to be collected especially a skills inventory, health and agriculture data.

SOCIAL/ORGANIZATIONAL

21. Leadership and Relations Between People
-a) Rabat has a 6 member shura comprised of 2 mullahs and 4 Mujahideen (parties above)

**POSITIVES**

-b) despite the threat the shura, villagers and BCURA are extremely firm, even defiant. "Just let these influential try to make trouble again!" they said. There appears to be strong unity about this. They will not be intimidated. (see 23(b))

22. **Outside Help**

-a) For leadership the shura depends a great deal on Eng. Abdullah Shamimi, head of BCURA, an indigenous NGO. Shamimi is from another village of Diehak district and is very well known and respected by everyone. All their lives Shamimi and shura members have known each other. Before the war Shamimi worked for the Ministry of Irrigation (how aquafer known) and was involved in organizing to get Rabat carpets improved but the war interrupted. Eng. Shamimi has an extremely strong natural ability in community participation and desire for self-reliance which he tries to instill in the others. The love and respect he has for these village people is very clear.

-b) BCURA does not have an office in Pakistan and spends most of the time

i) This shura formed 3 years ago but BCURA reports the shura has not done anything to help the people yet.

ii) In early attempts (when?) to organize the community, leaders who emerged then were murdered by local influential who are still a factor.
in Diehak. When he comes to Peshawar he represents the shura as he is the only English speaker.

23. Self-Help and Decision Making

- a) The village came together again only 1.5 years ago after being refugees for 8-10 years.

- b) However, the community has had major discussions and made major decisions together. Over the winter of 90/91 discussions were held at all 18 of Rabat's mosques every Friday. Community consensus was reached about the problems and in what order of priority they are. (see community Plan #25). BCURA was involved in these discussions and carried out a house-to-house survey of 500-600 households to verify choices made for the Plan.

i) Action for community self-help has not started yet.

24. Attitudes

- a) Rabat people have a very strong and positive attitude about solving the problems, as described in #21(b) even a defiance to do so.

- b) It was community consensus that the carpet problem of the women was number one priority, even ahead of the agricultural problems. This project for women is to come first. (A very unusual attitude in Afghanistan).

- The community appears to expect or want little
outside help. This may be Eng. Shamimi's influence. He is extremely concerned about self-reliance. When it was suggested solving the water problems could cost a lot of money, shura members were offended at the suggestion. "We don't want money! We only want water", one answered.
As expressed and agreed by the whole village, shura and NGO, the problems in order of priority are:

1. carpets
2. insects, mice, jarya
3. water for irrigation to develop land

Plan (and Status at November, 1991)
----------------------------------------

1. Carpet Project
-------------------
Status: a 3 month project has been designed to build a mud building for the women so they can work together. Land has been donated and the men will donate all labour. 110 women will participate benefiting 770 families. Cost: 102 Metric Tonnes wheat (at 10 kg/day/woman) plus 566,800 rps. ($22,672) for building roofing and carpet materials and equipment. A proposal, including building plan, is ready to take to funders.

2. Insects, Mice, Jarya
------------------------
Status: no one knew what to do to solve this problem. The consultant took Mr. Shamimi to ARIC to see the ACBAR agriculture guidelines and learned that the Swedish Committee offers training on pests. The consultant then introduced Mr. Shamimi to the Swedish Committee trainer. The shura is to choose a few villagers and the Swedish Committee will train them on getting rid of these pests.

3. Water for Irrigation to Develop Land
----------------------------------------
Status: The consultant advised the shura that extreme caution should be exercised about this to avoid problems. The shura agreed to wait until an water expert can be found to identify the root causes of the water problems and suggest the best solutions. This should be part of an all inclusive plan; water, crops, tree planting, inputs, marketing, etc. Consultant to find and refer water engineer and other expertise.

Integration
------------
This plan makes a lot of sense. The idea is to first have the women create an income base at home. (The carpet building to be built will serve as a women’s centre with potential for further developments). This will allow the men who work away, to come home and put their time into developing the land, which will probably employ many others. In the meantime, the major other agriculture problem (mice,etc.) will have been solved also.

Consultant’s Follow-up Report: Five Months Later (April 92)
The purpose of this kind of balanced study, looking at both the positives (resources) and negatives (needs) is to help a community look more closely at how they might be able to put its own resources to better use to use to fill needs. This way less outside help is needed and self-reliance is encouraged. It should show funders and NGOs how to help without over-helping.

If more time had been available, this study could have gone a lot further than it did. Community participation in this study was limited. Information was collected in 5 meetings between the consultant and Engineer Shamimi and in one meeting of the shura, Shamimi and consultant. Only once were other community members involved (the young men counting the mulberry trees.) Although wide participation would have been preferable, the community had already had such extensive discussion that involving them again would have been needless repetition (see 23(b)).

Nevertheless, some significant things came from this study. Results in this documentation hopefully will be useful for outsiders to understand this community. But some discoveries were made and some new developments occurred simply because of this study and discussion.

1. The study shows how Rabat is a very unusual community in Afghanistan. It already has strong community participation in decision making, planning and contributing labour. Before meeting the consultant they had already held extensive discussion and carried out a house-to-house survey to identify and get community consensus on the problems and their order of priority in which to be solved. (believed unprecedented)

2. The carpet project shows how the men of this community have an unusual priority for helping women, although this way may not be purely altruistic. In ideal participatory methods, this idea should have originated with the women but the exact origin is not known to the consultant. It is clear however, that the village women were consulted. In the case of Afghanistan, it is a very big development that the community as a whole support this idea as the number one priority, even ahead of agriculutre problems.

3. Further, it is unusual for Afghan communities to allow, even expect community women to organize themselves. This is the point for having the building where the women can work together and form a syndicate for production and marketing. The community knows very well, that once women are together they may choose to do additional activities themselves.

4. The community is already very aware of many of the resources of the village and how to put them to use; for example the huge piece of undeveloped land. Also they have a positive attitude about avoiding creating water problems and to make an integrated plan for the land use.
As a Result of this Study and Discussion

1. The shura suddenly became active. They decided to:
   - add a health and literacy programme to the women’s building to be built
   - send females of the village for training to run the health programmes
   - try to get the daughters of an educated family of the village to teach the literacy programme
   - finish construction on the abandoned clinic. They organized villagers and construction was finished six weeks later. The shura then moved the three male health workers into the clinic and now have a list of medical equipment and supplies needed.
   - To a certain extent the shura started seeing one problem as actually a solution. When they put the young "trouble makers" of town to work to survey the mulberry trees and they did it enthusiastically and well, the shura started getting ideas for other things these guys could do (ie. be trained in other agriculture subjects, eg. pest control.)

2. The biggest discovery was about the mulberry trees (12(d). As everyone is so experienced with agriculture, and has a long history using silk cocoons (brought from Kabul) it was surprising that no one knew about using mulberry trees to grow their own silk worms. The feasibility of a Rabat silk industry needs to be investigated with the Silk Research Institute at the University of Peshawar, but preliminary information suggests very good potential. The vast quantity of trees, high local and national demand, small supply and Rabat’s proximity to markets makes for promising potential. (For all the carpet industry being restored, there is no Afghan silk thread supplier. Silk growers in Faryab and Badghis produce for their own weavers’ use only.) The shura is most eager to meet with the Silk Institute (which I will arrange).

3. Considering that the shura was so opposed to re-starting the school, they showed high interest in adult training. (It was learned much later that the shura was not opposed to school per se. This survey was done at the time when the communist government was still in power and they feared opening the school meant more communist education.)

Conclusion

- the overall best effect of this survey and discussion was that the shura suddenly became active and getting many ideas themselves (above).

- I asked Mr. Shamimi, "why now?" (The shura had existed for three years but had not done anything to help the people.) Shamimi
answered, "no outsider has ever shown confidence in them before like you did. When they talked with you they got new ideas and decided they should just do them."

-In discussion, I had been extremely careful about making suggestions. In each of the above actions the shura took (except for the literacy programme, which was entirely their idea), I gave indirect hints mainly by asking questions. For example, about the abandoned clinic, I asked who was to own it, the village or the foreign NGO that had started the construction? When the shura was very clear that it was to be owned by the village, I asked if villagers had been the ones working on the construction? Yes, was the answer. Did they have a building plan and roofing materials?" "Yes." I pointed out that since this was an Arab NGO and there Gulf war was still on, maybe the NGO would never return. This apparently was enough for the shura to take charge.

-The discovery about mulberry trees came about when the shura and Shamini disagreed about why the cutting had occurred. To understand the significance of the cutting, I asked "how many trees are there?" When one elder said he thought about 50,000. This started the discussion about silk growing (because large numbers are needed). But the estimate seemed very high. Suggesting we contact the Silk Institute, I said they'd want accurate numbers and know the condition of the trees. Is there any way to have this kind of survey done? I asked the shura. Since the young trouble-makers in town had been mentioned several times, I asked, "can any of those boys read and write?" The shura instantly got the idea of assigning these fellows and as soon as our meeting finished, they sent a wireless radio message from Peshawar to Rabat giving instructions. As it turned out, the elder had actually under-estimated.

-As stated above, developments could have gone much further if more time had been available for discussion. None-the-less, even the short time appears to have proven the empowering effects such a participatory and balanced study can have.

Report One Year Later (January 1993)
Tragically, Eng. Abdullah Shamimi died suddenly of a heart attack in July, 1992. The quality of his leadership has become all the more apparent since then. Upon his death, his NGO stopped functioning, the shura stopped its activities and the shura and consultant lost touch.

This month, the consultant and Shamimi's 20 year old son finally were able to make contact. He, Humoyoon, is going to try to pick up where his father left off, at the shura's request. While Humoyoon is determined, his age and inexperience are against him.

If he is correctly interpreting what has happened since then and verbal messages between the consultant and shura (now in Kabul and Deihak) shura attitudes and some conditions seem to have changed. Shamimi's death has discouraged them badly.

Now Humoyoon has come to Peshawar with a long list of help the shura now says they need; karez cleaning, schools, mosques and other un-named things (while none of these were mentioned last year). While last year the shura had strong commitments to self-help with only a little outside help (very unusual now in eastern Afghanistan), the attitude seems to have switched to the much more common, "help has to come from the outside". Despite repeated appeals to Humoyoon to follow in his father's footsteps reinforcing the self-help attitude, he is starting to go with his shopping list from NGO to NGO. It is too early to tell their response, but one large NGO, famous for hand-outs has already shown interest. (It doesn't even ask, "what is the community doing for itself?" This NGO will go and tell the village what it needs, then supply it with their own workers.)

Urgent Need

The shura has asked to meet with me again and invited me to Kabul or Rabat but heavy fighting is occuring in Kabul and snow blocks the roads to Rabat. I have suggested that a review of the plan is needed.

(And I am anxious to meet the shura again first hand to see if their attitudes have changed or if conditions have forced the change. Humoyoon reports that since last year, many people who would have worked in village agriculture have started other businesses or left to find work in Iran. Because of the insect and water problems (ie. the one dried-up karez), they were unable to re-start crop growing. Now is it necessary for the shura to hire paid workers because they are scarce? Whereas last year, there was a good labour pool the shura was going organize as volunteers.)

It appears as though the shura could use a pep-talk to help them rebuild their self-confidence.

Village Up-date (Jan. 93)
a) The carpet project was sort of started. WFP supplied 102 MT of wheat, 87 MT of which was delivered to the village but 15 MT was hijacked by a political party in Deihak district. For reasons not yet known, some of the 87 MT was sold and the money used to buy some carpet materials and equipment and these were supplied to the women. The rest was distributed to villagers: to whom and for what reasons is not known at this time. With Shamimi's death, a proper report was not submitted to WFP so WFP is probably holding this shura in big doubt.

b) Traders are now coming to the village buying the new carpets but selling price not known at this time. Depending on the price women are getting, it is positive that the selling did not depend on Shamimi.

c) The carpet building was not built.

d) Shamimi spent months taking the carpet project proposal from funder to funder but was unsuccessful in finding the $22,000 cash needed for building materials and equipment. For unexplainable reasons he kept being put off by all contacted, in long bureaucratic hassles, leading to extreme frustration and stress for him, without a doubt being a contributing factor in his death. Considering this community's priority project was for women (extremely unusual in Afghanistan), and all funders talk about helping women, he received shameful treatment. (Funders were provided with copies of this community study and how the carpet project fit into a plan. On a number of occasions this consultant introduced Shamimi to funders or followed-up on his contacts, at his request. Despite excellent references from other funders (other projects his NGO had done in other places), he got nowhere.

e) Nothing ever happened about contacting the Swedish Committee for pest control, the Silk Institute, or about health or literacy training. (All Shamimi's time spent on d).

f) On January 24, 1993 the consultant took Humoyoon to the Swedish Committee, found that the SCA trains its own employees in pest control and agricultural extension and sends them back to their own villages. It was learned that the SCA has a worker in Deihak and we were able to meet him in the SCA office. It turns out that this worker knew Mr. Shamimi very well (they were even wounded together in an attack) and now he and Humoyoon live only a few hundred metres apart in the same village! Somehow, this worker did not know about this shura's problems but will help upon his return to Deihak in 2 days.

g) The consultant strongly suggests to Humoyoon that he lead the shura to do a full report on what happened to all the wheat and to finish this business with WFP. Also, a letter is to be written to the Swedish Committee to officially request help.
h) Now the shura specifies they need and want a school. The sturdy stone school they had, which served as a Mujahideen office all these years, was bombed and destroyed sometime during 1992.

Consultant’s Note:

Throughout this time, I have continually assessed and reassessed how to be involved in this process without having any responsibility or dependence transferred to me. It is an extremely delicate balance. As Shamimi experienced, and now his son is experiencing even moreso because he does not speak English, the aid community is exceedingly complex. There are well over 200 offices, each with specializations but these are very poorly communicated. For the simplest things, most Afghans justifiably do not know where to begin. It is a cultural characteristic not to ask questions anyway, and it is virtually impossible for an Afghan to walk into an office and ask, even if they are this bold. Introductions are essential. Besides limiting my role to discussion, I have at times played the key to these offices. Having been here a number of years, I know fairly well who is who. This means me making a few phone calls to the top (usually English speaking) foreigners in charge who then refer me to the appropriate source. These few minutes cut out months of looking by village people.

This is my fourth year of working with Afghan NGOs. Often I have helped them arrange meetings with funders but usually avoid attending the meeting myself, so that the NGO gets the feel themselves. (It’s too easy in such meetings for the discussion to drift into being between me and the funder (invariably English speaker). But occasionally I have gone to such meetings to make sure the NGO gets a fair hearing, to know about follow-up suggested, then coach but deflect all follow-up (eg. proposal writing) back to the NGO. Since all Afghan NGOs are so new, all of these activities are major learning opportunities.

Since Shamimi’s death, and I am convinced it was at least partly caused by the stress of bureaucracy, I have even more questions on what I and others could have done more effectively.

At the same time, despite complexities in making connections, "help" has spread like a plague to many places in the eastern provinces of Afghanistan (nearest to offices in Peshawar). And village people, of course, are no fools. They’ve been taught by NGOs and funders they can get this help, even when they may be perfectly capable of doing it themselves. [Case in point. Now the Delhak shura says they need help to build a mosque. Before the war they probably would not have dreamt of asking for such help; a mosque is a matter of community pride and duty. But now they’ve heard there’s this kind of help too in Peshawar.]

And my questions continue. How can I avoid dependence being built on me or inadvertently help transfer it elsewhere? And how tough should or can one be on a community to do-it-itsel?