REPORT ON TRIP TO PAKTIA, LOGAR, GHAZNI, AND WARDAK
OCTOBER 20 - NOVEMBER 1
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1. OBJECTIVES

This mission to Paktia, Logar, Wardak and Ghazni provinces of Afghanistan was conducted in my capacity as the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR)" representative to the UNDP sponsored UN Office for the Rehabilitation Strategy for Afghanistan (UNORSA). The objectives of the trip were as follows:

A) To familiarize myself with activities of NGOs working in eastern Afghanistan;

B) To provide an indication of the scope and scale of NGO activities and to make recommendations regarding the contribution NGOs can make to a rehabilitation strategy; and

C) To make observations and recommendations regarding rehabilitation needs and priorities in Afghanistan.

II. TRIP ITINERARY

October 20 -- Drove from Peshawar to Khost in Paktia province. Had tour of Khost.

October 21 -- Drove from Khost to Gardez and on to Baraki Barak district of Logar. Visited Amite Franco-Afghane (AFRANE) office near town of Baraki Rajan and had tour of 40 bed hospital being constructed by Aide Medicales Internationales Afghanistan (AMIA).

October 22 -- Drove through districts of Baraki Barak, Pul-i-Alam, and Kolangar to Mohammad Agha district of Logar. Visited projects of Reconstruction Authority for Afghanistan (RAFA) in Zarghoun Shahr, and Afghanistan Rehabilitation Organization (ARO) and CARE International in Dehnow.

October 23 -- Visited Baraki Rajan bazaar in Baraki Barak and then drove to Charkh district of Logar. Saw projects of Austrian Relief Committee (ARC) and AFRANE.

October 24 -- Drove from Baraki Barak through Tangi Wardak to Shashqala in southern Sayedabad district of Wardak. Attended conference for NGO staff organized by Coordination of Afghan Relief (CoAR).

October 25 -- Spoke at conference on role of NGOs in rural development and then drove to Ghazni city. Visited AFRANE office and then drove on to Kakrak, a valley in a Hazar area of Jaghlu district of Ghazni.

October 26 -- Met with Dr. Shahjan of Harakat Islami to discuss rehabilitation needs in Hazarajat. Visited AFRANE projects in Kakrak and Waghaz. Visited prostheses workshop of Islamic Aid Health Center (IAHC) and Handicap International (HI) in Spendai. Returned to Ghazni city.

See Appendix A for a complete list of acronyms used in this report.

The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of ACBAR or UNORSA.
October 27 -- Drove to Mokor district of Ghazni. On the way visited project of Save the Children (USA) (SCF-US) in Qarabagh district. Visited projects of CoAR in Mokor district.

October 28 -- Drove to Nawa subdistrict of Mokor. Visited Mercy Corps International (MCI) clinic and projects of CoAR. While returning, visited Abe Istada-i-Mokor, a saltwater lake which was formerly a protected wildlife sanctuary.

October 29 -- Drove from Mokor back to Ghazni city, toured the city, and then drove on to Sayedabad district of Wardak.

October 30 -- Visited CoAR projects in Zinakhan subdistrict of Sayedabad and then drove to Sayedabad Center and visited the offices of Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA), Sandy Gall’s Afghanistan Appeal (SGAA), and Volunteers in Technical Assistance (VITA).

October 31 -- Drove to Jaghatu district of Wardak and visited projects of Afghan Center for Rural Development (ACRD) and Helping Afghan Farmers Organization (HAFO).

November 1 -- Drove from Sayedabad back to Peshawar via Gardez and Khost.

III. TRIP OBSERVATIONS

The following sections provide a narrative account of my trip. Rather than just write a short trip report giving my observations and recommendations, I have instead prepared this narrative account in order to provide the reader with the context in which these observations and recommendations were made. The information presented does not always follow a chronological sequence but is rather grouped by the geographic regions I visited. For example, I passed through Ghazni on three separate occasions during this trip. Rather than discuss my observations of Ghazni in three different sections, I have instead grouped them together in one section. The reader should look at the trip itinerary presented above for a chronological account of the trip.

SHAHEEDAN, PAKISTAN - AFGHANISTAN BORDER

I crossed the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan at a town called Shaheedan ("place of martyrs"). The town was previously called Khardan, but at some point during the war the town’s name was changed to reflect the vast graveyard which developed in the town. Flags flew over the graves of all those who died fighting the Jihad. This sight, which was repeated on a lesser scale in just about every town or village we drove through, was a sobering reminder of the scale of the human cost of the war in Afghanistan.

The town is also a graveyard for the inanimate casualties of the war, as it has become an important center for the scrap metal industry. Vast lots were filled with every conceivable form of scrap metal, including the remains of vehicles, tanks, planes, shell casings, etc.... After being collected and sorted, the scrap metal is transported to Pakistan where it is melted down and resold. One positive effect of the scrap metal industry is that it has had the vulture-like effect of removing many of the visible effects of the war. Unlike the north, where the roadsides are often littered with the burnt out remains of trucks and tanks, the roads I travelled on in these eastern provinces had been picked clean.

The scrap industry has much more serious negative effects, however, as it thrives not only on what was destroyed during the war but also on the looting and plundering which has taken place following the war. Local authorities, and when possible the Kabul government, should be encouraged to regulate the scrap industry before all of Afghanistan’s movable assets have been shipped to Pakistan. I saw telephone and electricity wires, and metal runway strips (reportedly from Khos and Gardez airports) in the scrap yards.
As well as dealing in scrap, many of the traders are also reportedly transporting non-scrap assets to
Pakistan such as functioning medical equipment from hospitals, radio and radar equipment from airports,
military hardware, and government agricultural machinery. I saw at least 20 Russian-made tractors being
driven to Pakistan.

The scrap metal industry can also be dangerous as the scrap often contains unexploded ordnance. While
having breakfast in Gardez on the day I returned to Pakistan, I heard an explosion on the street right outside
the teahouse I was in. The Afghans I was travelling with went out to investigate and soon returned to report
that someone had accidentally set off a mine while loading a truck with scrap metal. Two people were killed
and a third seriously injured. I was informed that such accidents were common.

**KHOS**T, **PAK**TIA

The dirt road from Shaheedan to Khost was in poor condition although there was still a fair amount of traffic
(including some trucks carrying repatriating refugees and their belongings). The road passes through dry
and dusty hills, barren except for some scrub brush, before entering the plains surrounding Khost. We
passed a few destroyed villages, but as we approached the plains of Khost there were many signs of life
returning to normal. Water was running in irrigation channels, fields were being ploughed by ocn and
tractors, and villages were rebuilt and inhabited. The plains surrounding Khost contained an impressive
amount of irrigated agricultural land. Driving into Khost we passed a Short Term Assistance for
Rehabilitation Team (START) road crew with bulldozers and trucks repairing the road. The road building
equipment had been donated by the Norwegian Refugee Council/ Norwegian Church Aid (NRC/NCA).

Khost bazaar was full of traffic and was bustling with activity. The town had obviously seen better days,
however, as most of the buildings appeared fairly dilapidated and pockmarked by bullets. Government
buildings appeared particularly run-down as they bore the brunt of the looting and vandalization which
occurred following the collapse of the former government in April. Many had had their doors, windows and
furnishings looted. Various political parties appeared to have taken over many of the government buildings.

It was hard to escape the conclusion during my trip that there is little respect in Afghanistans for public
property. In town after town we visited, the schools, hospitals, and government offices had been stripped
clean of furniture, doors and windows and their frames, wiring, and in some cases even the steel bar from
reinforced concrete. When it comes to looting, government property is a much safer target than private
property as it is unlikely that anyone will defend it with their life. Donors and NGOs should bear this in mind
before they invest much money in rebuilding public buildings or when building new schools and hospitals.
The next time there is a collapse of authority these buildings could again tempt looters. The lack of respect
for public property provides a compelling case for getting communities to contribute significantly towards
the cost of building schools and medical facilities. If communities have paid for them there is probably a
greater chance that they will protect them.

The white and black striped flag of the Pakistani political party, Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI), was flying over
the former cinema which had reportedly been converted into a madrassah. (Someone noted that
Afghanistan had enough problems with its own political parties and the last thing it needed was Pakistan's
political parties to further complicate matters.) During the trip I saw several posters of Pakistani leaders,
especially of the former President General Zia ul Haq and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, displayed on shop
doors and walls. On one occasion I asked a shopkeeper why he had a big poster of Nawaz Sharif hanging
on his wall. His response was, "because he was a friend of Zia."

Khost bazaar appeared to be rapidly coming back to life. Shops were being repaired, restaurants built, and
streets were filled with vendors. An impressive variety of merchandise was being sold in the shops. Just
about every block had at least one or two signs advertising pharmacies, medical stores, or doctors' offices.

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(It could be that too much medicine rather than too little is the more serious problem in some areas of Afghanistan.) Near the center of the town were large lots filled with wood. One of the more remarkable sights in the bazaar was a sign identifying a shop as a travel agency.

I spoke with one cloth merchant who claimed that business was very good. His only complaint was the heavy bribes he had to pay to Pakistani police to transport his cloth from Pakistan. Many people complained about the increasing difficulty of transporting goods across the border. The recent tightening of border controls seems somewhat shortsighted as it would seem to be in everyone's interest to encourage as much trade as possible between the two countries (with the exception of goods subsidized by the Pakistan government). While I was talking to the cloth merchant a customer paid for his cloth in Pakistani rupees. When I commented on this, someone acerbically noted that Khost was still part of Pakistan and that it was not until one reached Gardez, where afghans were more common than rupees, that one had truly entered Afghanistan.

I arrived in Khost too late to visit NGO offices or projects. Many NGOs are active in the Khost area including CARE, START, Afghan Construction and Logistics Unit (ACLU), Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR), International Rescue Committee (IRC), and Islamic Relief Agency (ISRA). In Khost bazaar, there were many signs advertising IRC English classes, although these were apparently just using the IRC name as IRC has no English program in Khost. On the road out of Khost towards Gardez, DACAAR has its factory which manufactures roof-beams.

**KHOSIT TO BARAKI BARAK, LOGAR**

The drive from Khost to Baraki Barak took about seven hours. We first crossed the plains of Khost and then entered a valley which led up to Satakandow pass. Much of the valley was barren but there were many (often destroyed) villages surrounded by orchards. Fall colors were at their peak and the orchards were a blaze of yellows, oranges, and reds. In many fields, men and women were husking maize, and many rooftops were bright orange where maize was being dried. As we approached the pass, the mountainsides were sparsely forested with the pines for which Pakti was once famous. From the pass we descended to the plains of Gardez along a road which in places was lined with painted rocks warning of the danger of mines. From the pass to Gardez the few villages which once existed were abandoned and destroyed.

The skyline of Gardez was dominated by the impressive Balahisar fort. Gardez bazaar was clogged with traffic and kalishnikov-toting men. There were many shops selling weapons and ammunition, a sight I did not see in Khost. Shopkeepers sat behind piles of bullets neatly sorted by caliber in much the same way that rice, lentils, and flour are neatly piled in dry goods stores. The scrap metal business also seemed to be important in Gardez as many shops had shell casings and other scrap piled high in front and besides their shops. The Afghans I was travelling with felt the situation in Gardez was unstable and chose not to stop. On our return, however, car trouble forced us to stop there for breakfast which is when the mine accident referred to earlier occurred.

From the plains of Gardez we entered another valley and climbed up to Tera pass, the boundary line between Pakti and Logar provinces. After descending from the pass into the plains of Logar, we left the main paved road from Gardez to Pul-i-Alam and Kabul, and entered into a small desert area. Half way across the desert we passed the burnt out remains of a bus lying beside the road. I was told that during the war it had been rocketed by gunships killing all 30 passengers on board. The bus, which had flags flying over it, had been declared off limits to scrap metal dealers and was being preserved as a memorial. After crossing the small desert, we crossed the Charkh river and entered into the fertile plains of Baraki Barak.

The road from Khost to Logar is, by Afghan standards, quite good. Through the Khost plains the road is paved, and with the exception of a few washouts, is in good condition. After leaving the plains the pavement
soon ends but the road still remains very passable. About a third of the way up the valley ACLU, which is being financed by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to repair the Khost to Gardez road, has its center. From there to the pass there was an impressive amount of road work being done (culverts, drainage systems, compaction, etc.). The widening of the winding road leading up to the pass was particularly impressive. The road from the pass down to Gardez was rough but adequate. After Gardez the condition of the road improved dramatically and was good all the way to Logar.

BARAKI BARAK, LOGAR

The district of Baraki Barak is a good example of an area relatively untouched by the war. The area saw little fighting or bombing, and very little of its population left as refugees (evidently commanders ordered the local population not to leave Baraki Barak as they needed their support). Irrigation systems were generally maintained and fields cultivated. It appeared to be a relatively prosperous agricultural area, with well irrigated fields lined by poplar trees. Fields were being ploughed by oxen, fertilizer was being spread, and wheat was being sown. There was a lot of livestock in the fields and in and around villages. I spent an hour wandering around Baraki Rajan bazaar, which like all the other bazaars I saw, was crowded and full of a wide variety of goods.

As a result of the relative security in Baraki Barak, a large number of NGOs chose to work there. According to the latest ACBAR Database of NGO Activities, 16 NGOs have reported projects in Baraki Barak. In addition to the projects which I intentionally visited, such as AMIA's 40 bed hospital, I saw a large number of NGO projects unintentionally just while driving around the district -- culverts and bridges by VITA, road repair and erosion control by DACCAAR, road repair by CoAR, and clinics supported by SCA. Although I did not stop to ask, I'm sure many of the fruit trees I saw had been supplied by NGOs and many of the recently harvested wheat fields had undoubtedly grown improved wheat seed varieties provided by NGOs.

I was struck by the large number of NGO activities in what appeared to me to be a relatively prosperous area not desperately in need of much outside assistance. The reason is understandable as during the war years NGOs selected project sites where they could be guaranteed a relative degree of security. In many cases (at least in the eastern provinces), the stable areas are also the most prosperous as a result of the stability. Now that the security situation has generally improved in rural areas, donors and NGOs need to reconsider and re-prioritize their project areas and project activities.

This is not to say that all assistance to more prosperous areas should end. It is to say that relief and rehabilitation projects, which implement projects or distribute inputs freely or at a nominal cost, should end in these more prosperous areas. They should be replaced by more sustainable projects where the role of the NGO becomes increasingly to provide technical expertise and advice to communities on how they can help themselves, rather than simply to be a channel for delivering external aid. NGOs should consider redirecting their relief and rehabilitation activities to the areas most devastated by the war, and focus on more developmentally oriented projects in the more prosperous areas.

BARAKI BARAK TO MOHAMMAD AGHA, LOGAR

The drive from Baraki Barak district to Mohammad Agha district of Logar provided a dramatic example of the dangers of making generalizations regarding rehabilitation needs in Afghanistan. While Baraki Barak was relatively untouched by the war, much of Mohammad Agha district was completely destroyed. If one saw the former without seeing the latter, it would be easy to conclude that there is little need for continued rehabilitation assistance. The levelled villages and uncultivated land of Mohammad Agha were a stark reminder that much work remains to be done.
After leaving Baraki Barak, we drove north through Pul-i-Alam and Kolangar districts before reaching Mohammad Agha. The district center of Pul-i-Alam was rather unassuming. There were several dilapidated government buildings pockmarked by bullets. Near to the main road was a green metal landing strip which with some minor maintenance looked like it would still be usable. (Maybe not for long, however, as there were reports that it had been difficult to convince looters not to rip up the runway and sell it as scrap metal.)

Kolangar bazaar was the largest I saw in Logar. I counted over 300 shops lining the road, many constructed from trucking containers or ammunition packing crates. Much of the bazaar had reportedly been constructed during the last six months providing further indications of an economy coming back to life. Several medical shops had mine awareness posters stuck to their doors or walls. I even saw a photography store with an old box camera sitting out front. As we left Kolangar we passed through a checkpoint of the shura of Kolangar which was taxing vehicles, probably to collect money for salaries.

As we headed north on the highway from Pul-i-Alam to Kolangar to Mohammad Agha, the condition of the highway steadily deteriorated and the level of destruction steadily increased. We passed more and more completely destroyed and abandoned villages. Nevertheless, most of the fields on either side of the road were either being cultivated or being prepared for cultivation. Tangi Wahjan, the pass between Kolangar and Mohammad Agha was pitted by enormous bomb craters. When we passed into Mohammad Agha I was struck by the level of destruction. Not a house was standing and for the first time the majority of fields on either side of the highway appeared not to be cultivated.

The first village we came to was Dehnnow. Some shops and a restaurant had sprung up beside the highway forming a small bazaar. The former town of Dehnnow, however, was devastated. Even the Afghans I was travelling with, several of whom had travelled extensively in Afghanistan, were shocked by what they saw. A few refugee families had returned and could be seen rebuilding their homes, but the majority had reportedly stayed in Pakistan.

In Dehnnow we visited the office of ARO which had cleaned Dehnnow canal, built a small bridge, and was building some flood control structures. We also visited Shahi canal which had been cleaned by CARE, which is cleaning many irrigation systems in Mohammad Agha district. A major problem in the area was reported to be spring flooding which washed away farmland and deposited large quantities of sand on otherwise fertile soil. Several people requested assistance to build flood control structures. I also noticed saltpeter in some areas indicating that waterlogging was a problem.

At one point, walking through the town of Dehnnow, we stopped to buy apples. I noticed that the weights being used to weigh the apples were de-activated (I hope) mines. Mines are a serious problem in Mohammad Agha. ARO reported that one of their workers was injured by a mine. I also heard reports of workers from other agencies getting killed or wounded by mines. I have to admit to being considerably relieved after we finished visiting project sites in Dehnnow.

Just about everywhere we went on this trip, the palpable tension and inevitable comments whenever a driver would stray from the beaten track were an indication that the fear of mines was always in the back of people’s minds. The problem of mines is one of the most difficult issues that the Rehabilitation Strategy will have to deal with, especially as there are no easy answers or solutions to the problem. De-mining is a very slow, expensive, and dangerous task, and yet one which is very important. Determining resource allocation for such an important but expensive activity will not be easy.

From Dehnnow we drove across a desert area to Zarghoun Shahr, a sub-district of Mohammad Agha. As the town of Zarghoun Shahr was about one hour’s drive from the main highway, it escaped the devastation that Dehnnow suffered. Nevertheless, most of its population left for Pakistan as refugees, although many are reported to have returned this year.
From Zarghoun Shahr we drove on to see Surkhab canal/karez which was being cleaned by RAFA. The water for the canal comes from Surkhab dam, follows a karez through about three kilometers of hillside, and then enters a canal for about 15-20 kilometers. The canal portion had been cleaned and only the karez portion remained. I could see workers at the bottom of the well shafts loading dirt and rocks into buckets which were then hauled up on karez wheels and emptied at the top.

Surkhab dam was reportedly constructed with German government assistance during the reign of Zahir Shah. The water level was very low when I visited but in the spring it reportedly fills up. Only one of the three gates of the dam is now functioning which could pose some risks if there are heavy spring rains and floods. At some point donors should consider repairing the other two gates in order to take full advantage of the capabilities of this important asset. The canal also needs some structural work near the outlet from the dam gate as it reportedly breaches every spring, flooding Surkhab village and the agricultural land surrounding it. At one point on the canal, a retaining wall was being constructed reportedly by an Arab NGO.

From Surkhab we returned to the main highway, and drove up to visit the district center of Mohammad Agha (little more than an hour south of Kabul). It had also been devastated by the war. We did see a canal which had been cleaned, either by CARE or RAFA, but very little land was being cultivated. Virtually the entire population left for Pakistan as refugees and few have returned. We were told that the main thing keeping refugees from returning was the serious mine problem in the area. I would suspect that a contributing factor would also be Mohammad Agha’s proximity to the instability in Kabul.

CHARKH, LOGAR

On October 23, we drove from Baraki Barak for about one hour to Charkh district of Logar. Charkh is a beautiful valley which, like Baraki Barak, was relatively untouched by the war. Charkh is famous for its fruit, and in particular its grapes. We passed many piles of wood fruit packing cases being assembled indicating that there is still a market for Charkh’s fruit. Like most other bazaars I saw, Charkh bazaar was teeming with activity. Once again, I was impressed by the variety of goods available. For example, just in terms of toiletries I saw several shops with shelves loaded with cosmetics, toilet paper, soaps, shampoos, shaving cream, and toothpaste.

Several NGOs have activities in Charkh. The main one was reported to be ARC which among other things had built bridges and culverts, diversion dams, and supported income generating activities. VITA had repaired the road over Karpichak Pass between Charkh and Kharwar and had surveyed some dams. Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI) had distributed some improved wheat seed and fruit trees, and was renting tractors and threshers out at a subsidized rate. SCA was supporting four clinics in Charkh, and Management Sciences for Health (MSH) had health workers but reportedly no clinics. SCA and University of Nebraska, Omaha (UNO) were both providing support to party schools. When I asked what the biggest need was in Charkh, I was told that a deep well for drinking water was needed as the only water supply was the river which ran through the valley but which was polluted.

In Charkh, we had lunch at the house of an engineer working for CoAR. We were joined by his brother who had received nine months of medical training in Peshawar and is now working at an SCA clinic in Charkh (everyone referred to him as ‘Dr. Sahib’). On the wall of their mehman khana (guest room) was a poster of a mujahid manning an anti-aircraft gun with a caption in Dari saying, “A mujahid without culture is a warrior without a cause.” This led one of the Afghans I was with to remark that mental and cultural rehabilitation was a much more important need in Afghanistan than physical rehabilitation. There was an urgent need, he said, to make the transition from a mujahid culture back to a civilian culture. Efforts need to be made, he continued, to change even such things as the fashion codes which developed during the war (i.e. wearing the pakol caps with rolled up edges, combat jackets, and kalishnikovs) as the younger
generation, wanting to emulate the mujahideen, were adopting the same fashions. I was told that before
the war no one wore the pakols which are so common today except in some areas of Nuristan.

After lunch we climbed part of the way up the mountain behind the town of Charkh, past houses with roofs
covered with raisins drying in the sun, until we could look down over the entire valley. The sight was
spectacular as the entire valley in front of us was full of orchards and vineyards which were all shades of
yellow, orange, and red.

BARAKI BARAK TO SAYEDABAD, WARDAK

On October 24th, field staff from several NGOs working in Baraki Barak and I drove to Shashqala in southern
Sayedabad district of Wardak to attend a conference for NGO staff organized by CoAR. From Baraki Barak
we entered the well irrigated and fertile valley of Tangi Wardak. In addition to its rich agricultural lands, the
valley is also famous for its marble mines. The dirt road we followed up the valley was quite rough. There
were signs that the road had been surveyed by Engineering Services for Afghanistan Reconstruction (ESAR).
Other than some culverts which were reported to have been built by VITA, no work has begun to repair the
road. We passed several impressive looking madrassas and mosques which were being built by Arab
organizations. Reportedly, work on one madrassah stopped when the locals, who were very willing to
accept assistance to build the madrassah, refused to accept the teachers and curriculum that would go along
with the building.

At the end of the Tangi Wardak valley we crossed over a small pass and entered a dry and relatively barren
valley with the Kabul to Kandahar "highway" running through it. The highway was the worst stretch of road
we had travelled on to date. Along some stretches there was some pavement left, but it was covered with
bone-jarring potholes. Where there was no pavement, the road deteriorated into long waves of dirt track.
I was told that before the war one could travel from Kabul to Herat by bus in one long day. Now it takes
two full days to get from Kabul just to Kandahar which was a six hour journey before the war. Rebuilding
such an important road as this should be one of the priorities for the Rehabilitation Strategy for Afghanistan.

SAYEDABAD, WARDAK

The province of Wardak has one of the highest concentrations of NGO projects of any province in
Afghanistan. In the ACBAR Database of NGO Activities, 37 NGOs have reported activities in Wardak. In
Sayedabad district alone, 24 NGOs have reported projects. The best explanation I received to explain this
high concentration of NGO activities in Wardak was that due to its location just south of Kabul, a higher
percentage of Wardakis went to Kabul University than from most other provinces. These university
graduates, many from the Engineering Faculty, are now in senior positions in International NGOs or are
directors of Afghan NGOs. When given the opportunity, many choose to work in their home areas.

My main reason for going to Sayedabad was to attend a conference for NGO staff hosted by CoAR at their
office in Shashqala. The purpose of the conference was primarily to discuss the results of CoAR’s seed
experimentation program. Anthony Fitzherbert and John Stevens of the Food and Agricultural Organization
(FAO), and Jean-Louis Benassi and Eng. Haroon of AFRANE, spoke on the programs of FAO, on wheat
seed issues, and on the findings of the seed experimentation program after its first year. I gave a more
general presentation on the role of NGOs in rural development. It was good to see NGO staff from Ghazni,
Wardak, and Logar sitting together, listening to presentations, sharing experiences, and discussing issues
of mutual concern. More significant than what was actually said at the conference, I believe, was the fact
that a conference was being held in Afghanistan rather than in Pakistan. Whenever possible, donors and
NGOs should increasingly make the effort to shift the venue of conferences and similar events to
Afghanistan, and to begin the process (at least symbolically) of cutting the umbilical cord to Pakistan.
While in Sayedabad I visited the projects of CoAR in the sub-district of Zina Khan. Using World Food Programme (WFP) wheat in a food-for-work programme, CoAR had done a good job repairing the road from the highway to Zina Khan. In Zina Khan we visited several karezes cleaned by CoAR, their seed testing plots, and the foundations of a school they were building as a food-for-work program using WFP wheat.

One of the karezes we visited brought water to the village of Buyani. Where the karez water exited from the hillside, a "hamam" (bathhouse) had been built. Attached to the bathhouse was a furnace room and a mosque and madrassah (religious school). The heat from the furnace room heated the bathhouse, and used the ingenious traditional heating system used in many areas of Afghanistan to carry hot air under the floor of the mosque and madrassah to heat them during the winter months. On the walls of the one room madrassah were four silk screened posters, I believe provided by UNO. There was a map of Afghanistan, a chart with the Persian alphabet, a chart with numbers, and a chart explaining the times for prayer.

One of the great tragedies of the war clearly has been the destruction of Afghanistan's modest educational system. In just about every district center I drove through, the lycees had been completely destroyed. Many schools were destroyed by mujahideen during the early years of the war as they were suspected of propagating communism. This left madrassahs, such as the one I visited in Buyani, as the only acceptable form of education in many areas of Afghanistan. In the absence of alternatives, several donors and NGOs provided teacher salaries, textbooks, and school supplies to these madrassahs. There is the possibility, however, that this has or will legitimize their status as schools, and those earning salaries as teachers. With few exceptions, madrassahs and their teachers cannot be equated with pre-war schools and teachers. This is not to say that there is not an important educational role for madrassahs, but that their role should be distinguished from that of schools. An important reason for doing this is that the educational level of those teaching in Afghanistan's madrassahs is often very low and it would be virtually impossible to introduce competency based testing of teachers in madrassahs as one could in schools. There would therefore be no way to weed out the many teachers who are at best able to teach basic literacy and numeracy, and to provide basic religious instruction. This would be a very weak foundation on which to rebuild Afghanistan's educational system.

The encouraging news on the education front is that there seems to be a high demand for it (although more for boys than for girls). I received several requests to rebuild lycees that had been destroyed during the war. Several people commented on the urgent need to get children back into schools. In one area I was told the community wanted to expand the local school into a lycee as the terrible condition of the highway had turned the former 20 minute bus ride to the lycee in the district center into a two hour commute. Near Sayedabad Center I drove past the remains of a former government school on one side of the highway and on the other side literally hundreds of students sitting in classes in a field being instructed by teachers with blackboards. Nowhere did I get the impression that rebuilding schools would be a controversial measure.

In the environment of Peshawar, Quetta, and the refugee camps, many NGOs chose to avoid getting involved in the educational sector as it often raised very sensitive and controversial issues. Agencies that did get involved had to proceed carefully and cautiously with their programs. I definitely got the impression in Afghanistan, however, that education is a lot less controversial an issue than it was with the refugee community in Pakistan. Although it will still require a great deal of sensitivity to cultural and political issues, I would recommend that donors and NGOs reconsider their reluctance to get involved in the educational sector.

Little remains of Sayedabad Center. It has, however, become a popular place to locate NGO offices. I visited SCA, DAI, VITA, and SGAA offices there. SCA has its head office for Wardak, Logar, and Ghazni in Sayedabad Center. It is supporting and implementing projects in the areas of health, education, agriculture and engineering. The DAI office was closed although I was told they had programs for improved seed and agricultural equipment. About 350 tons of Pirsabak improved seed was lying undistributed next to their office. VITA is primarily engaged in surveying and building small dams and repairing and building roads.
SGAA has recently set up a workshop which produces intermediate technology prostheses and provides physiotherapy for the disabled. South of Sayedabad Center I saw signs for ISRA’s main office, an ISRA clinic, an International Medical Corps (IMC) hospital, and a school built by ESAR.

JAGHATU, WARDAK

I spent the day of October 31st in Jaghatu district of Wardak. The road from the main highway up to the pass which is the border between Sayedabad and Jaghatu had been repaired by CoAR and was in good condition. On the Jaghatu side of the pass the condition of the road deteriorated as it descended into the plains of Jaghatu.

I spent most of my time in Jaghatu visiting the projects of ACRD located on the estate of Qazi Amin Wardak in Sheikh Ali. Established in the early eighties, ACRD is probably running the oldest NGO-implemented rural development program in Afghanistan. It has a very impressive poultry program (including a room full of turkeys), 100 boxes of bees which reportedly produced 1,400 kgs. of honey this year, an animal husbandry program, a veterinary program, an experimental program to raise and plant pine trees from Paktia, a tractor and thresher rental program, a wheat seed experimentation program, an improved seed and fertilizer distribution program, and several large orchards for apples, apricots, almonds, and walnuts. Assisted by UNO, ACRD is managing eight schools in Jaghatu. In cooperation with Medicin du Monde (MDM), ACRD also helps run a hospital in Jaghatu.

In Jaghatu, I also visited the office of HAFO although there was no time to visit any projects. HAFO has programs in the areas of animal husbandry, karez cleaning, honey bees, poultry, and fruit trees. The Dutch Committee for Afghanistan (DCA) is constructing an office and veterinary clinic next to HAFO’s office.

GHAZNI

From Wardak we drove over a small pass into the dry and dusty plains of Ghazni. The first town we drove through contained the mausoleum of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni (998-1030), a central figure of the Ghaznavid period. The mausoleum itself seems to have escaped major structural damage during the war although I was told that the gardens in front of the mausoleum are only a shade of their former glory. The front portion of the garden has been turned into a martyrs’ graveyard.

We then drove past the famous Minarets of Ghazni, built during the 12th century. There were several military posts near the minarets and the remains of several tanks and military vehicles. We were warned that there was a danger of mines in the area so we only were able to look at the Minaret of Bahram Shah. Near the top there was a neat hole about two feet in diameter where it appears to have taken a direct hit of some sort. Other than that, however, the minaret looked in good condition and most of its ornate brick work remained intact. Opposite the minarets on the eastern side of the highway is a hill called Tapa Sardar which is the sight of Important excavations from the Buddhist period. Unfortunately, due to its strategic location, the hill is now a security post and we were unable to visit it.

While in Ghazni I also visited the mausoleum of Hakim Sanai (12th c.), one of the most famous poets of the Ghaznavid period. Like the mausoleum of Sultan Mahmud, the structure seems to be undamaged but the former gardens have not been maintained. Inside the mausoleum pilgrims were saying prayers by Hakim Sanai’s tomb and in a small prayer room behind the tomb. In the front courtyard of the mausoleum there was a small covered stairwell leading down to a small unlit tunnel. We crawled along the tunnel for about 15 meters before it opened up into a two meter by two meter underground room with a small air vent which let in some light. Hakim Sanai evidently used to meditate for 40 days at a time in this room. I was told that even today those in the area who wanted to become pirs had to spend 40 days in the room meditating.
Ghazni City's skyline is dominated by the Balahlsar fort which looms impressively over the rest of the city. Entering the city we had to take a detour as the main bridge over the river has a span missing. (I was told that this minor detail was once forgotten by some drunken Soviet soldiers who drove a tank into the river as a result.) The city streets were jammed with trucks and other vehicles. It was on entering Ghazni City that I witnessed one of the most surreal sights of this trip -- a uniformed traffic cop complete with handlebar mustache. The sight was impressive regardless of the fact that no one seemed to pay attention to his gestures.

The next day we wandered around both the new and old parts of the city. Like the other towns I visited, the government buildings of Ghazni were shabby and rundown, and pockmarked by bullets. Unlike in most towns and cities, however, little looting took place in Ghazni City following the collapse of the former government in April. As the city's streets were unpaved there was a thick layer of dust over everything. In the crowded market area I was again struck by the quantity and variety of goods available. For a country that has been at war for 14 years there is still an impressive amount of economic activity. I saw truck after truck being loaded with sheep and goat skins indicating that there is still a market for this traditionally important export of Ghazni.

After visiting the new city we got permission from the shura of Ghazni to visit the old walled city which is located just below the Balahlsar. I was not able to enter into the Balahlsar as it was a military post and as a result had been mined. I was told that it had been badly damaged during the war. I spent about an hour walking through the narrow streets and alleys of the old city. The portion I walked through had been badly damaged. Due to its location right below the citadel, it was often subjected to rocket attacks. In several places, however, I did see people rebuilding homes.

One of the impressive characteristics of Ghazni was the relatively peaceful coexistence between ethnic groups. I saw lots of Hazaras in the town and evidently there have been few serious clashes between Hazaras and Pushtun (unlike in many other areas of the province). I was also surprised to see so many Sikh shopkeepers. Unlike in Kabul, I was told that few, if any, Sikhs left Ghazni following the change of government in April.

On the outskirts of Ghazni the main commander of Harakat Islami for Ghazni, Dr. Shahjan, gave me a tour of the airport which he controls. Most of the airport buildings had been destroyed and the perimeters of the airport were littered with the remains of destroyed planes, tanks, military vehicles, and artillery shells. There were still some radars mounted on the backs of trucks which reportedly still functioned. The metal landing strip had clearly not been used for quite some time as there were bushes growing up through holes all over the strip. If these were removed, however, it looked like the landing strip would not require a great deal of additional repair work before it could be used. Next to the airport were three big warehouses which looked like they were in good condition and would be potential sites to store WFP wheat or other relief and rehabilitation supplies.

GHAZNI CITY TO KAKRAK, GHAZNI

From Ghazni we drove south for about one hour on the Kabul-Kandahar highway. The road condition was terrible; an endless roller coaster ride ascending and descending over the waves that the road surface had deteriorated into. At Spandai, about a half hour south of Ghazni, we passed a sign for the clinic and prosthesis workshop of IAH and HI. We stopped and visited the workshop which is using locally available materials to make below- and above-the-knee prostheses. I was impressed by the enthusiasm and apparent dedication of the staff of this workshop to their work.

At the town of Nani, about one hour south of Ghazni City, we turned off the highway. We drove west up a valley for about two hours through the Pashtun area of Waghaz to the Hazara area of Kakrak in Jaghatu.
district of Ghazni. Most of the dirt road had been repaired by AFRANE and was in relatively good condition. AFRANE had also paid to clean karezes in the valley. Medicin Sans Frontieres (MSF) used to have a hospital in Waghaz but when they pulled out it closed. IMC has a clinic in Kakrak and Afghanistan Vaccination and Immunization Centre (AVICEN) has an EPI vaccination program. Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC) is rebuilding a school in Kakrak.

In Kakrak I met with Dr. Shahjan to discuss the need for more NGO assistance in Hazara areas. I pointed out that logistical difficulties and security problems had discouraged many NGOs from working in the Hazarajat. He promised to guarantee security for humanitarian agencies working in the areas under his control. While there are good reasons why few NGOs work in the Hazarajat, the facts remain that Hazara areas are among the poorest in Afghanistan and among the most under-served by NGOs. Donors and NGOs alike need to make every effort to reassess the possibilities of responsibly providing assistance to the Hazarajat.

GHAZNI CITY TO MOKOR, GHAZNI

On October 27th we drove from Ghazni City to the town of Mokor, which gives its name to the southernmost district of Ghazni province. The three hour journey took five hours due to car trouble. I would estimate that the time I spent in a vehicle while in Afghanistan was increased by about 25 percent due to car troubles. Whether it was flat tires, the brakes giving out, the water pump breaking, a clogged fuel filter, watered down diesel, or broken shock absorbers and leaf springs, just about every trip involved some delays due to car problems. This said less about the condition of the vehicles I travelled in, which was generally good, than the terrible road conditions which cause a lot of wear and tear on vehicles. Just on the trip from Wardak back to Pakistan we broke 15 leaf springs and one shock absorber. More impressive than the car problems was the speed with which the problems were solved. Every driver in Afghanistan doubles as a mechanic, and every town seemed to have a workshop capable of getting most cars up and running again. I was also impressed by the availability of diesel. We never had trouble finding diesel although we did have a problem with the diesel being watered down.

I would think that repairing some of Afghanistan’s main roads would be quite a cost-effective endeavor just in terms of the reduction in vehicle repair and maintenance costs that would result. A big road repair program would also result in tremendous time savings and the ability to get goods to market more quickly, easily, and cheaply. It would also be a good opportunity to employ demobilized personnel in order to encourage the transition from military back to civilian life.

The road from Ghazni to Mokor was terrible, except for Qarabagh district, where strangely the pavement suddenly returned and was generally in good condition. The terrain was very dry and in some places looked like a sandy desert. We passed several large caravans of Kuchi nomads who I was told were heading south to their winter grazing grounds in Helmand. In northern Qarabagh district we stopped to see Baran Qala canal which was being built by SCF (US). SCF is also cleaning karezes and repairing roads in Qarabagh district. DACAAR and Khorasan Assistance Group (KAG) are also active in Qarabagh, although Pashtun and Hazara tensions have often made it difficult for NGOs to implement projects in this district.

MOKOR, GHAZNI

Mokor is a large town right on the Kabul to Kandahar highway. The main NGO working in the district of Mokor is CoAR. I visited their poultry program, tractor and thresher rental program, fruit orchards, seed testing plots, karez cleaning projects, and road and culvert repair projects. The shura of Mokor has also given them the use of a big wheat godown which has the capacity to store 10,000 tons of wheat. CoAR is using it to store WFP wheat which it uses to implement food-for-work programs.
I spent one day visiting the sub-district of Nawa, which is a three hour drive southeast of Mokor on a very bad dirt road. The road eventually leads to Badini on the Pakistan - Afghanistan border in Baluchistan, reportedly a full day's drive from Nawa. The terrain between Mokor and Nawa was very dry and covered with sagebrush. In many places we saw people harvesting the sagebrush, loading it onto tractor trailers and trucks, and transporting it to markets where it is sold as fuel.

About half the population of Nawa was reported to have left for Pakistan as refugees. A few were said to have begun to return and I saw a considerable number of new buildings being constructed in the small town of Nawa. By all accounts, the top rehabilitation priority in Nawa was to repair and clean karezes. It was the lack of water, I was told, which was keeping refugees from returning. Just while driving around it was clear that a lot more land used to be irrigated than is irrigated now. While in Nawa we visited a few of the karezes cleaned by CoAR as well as a clinic run by MCI.

On our return to Mokor we stopped for an hour at Abe Istada-i-Mokor, a large saltwater lake which is an important stopover point for migratory birds. Several Kuchi families with large herds of sheep and camels were camped by the side of the lake. The lake is reportedly home to a large number of flamingos although I did not see any. Before the war it was a protected wildlife reserve but hunting ducks with kalishnikovs now seems to be a popular pastime for passers by. Before going to Mokor a colleague requested that I look for rare Siberian cranes which traditionally nested at the lake but whose numbers are shrinking at an alarming rate. Although I did see some white birds which roughly fit the description, they were too far away for a non-specialist like myself to identify them definitively. Unfortunately, as I tried to get closer, mujahideen started firing their kalishnikovs, either to bag some ducks or to scare up birds for the benefit of the video I was taking. The firing did scare up many birds, primarily ducks. The large number of weapons, and the penchant of many Afghans to shoot any wildlife they see, does not bode well for the future of wildlife and former sanctuaries such as the Abe Istada.

IV. SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Resilience of Afghan Society -- During my two week trip I was struck more by the level of economic activity in the bazaars, and the agricultural activity in the fields, than I was by the destruction caused by the war. This is not to minimize the level of destruction which in most areas was evident and in some areas was monumental. It is more to say that we should not underestimate the resilience of Afghan society and its ability to rebound from the war and to rebuild what was destroyed. On several occasions we passed villages which I was told had been rebuilt during the last year and green fields which I was told were being cultivated for the first time since the early years of the war. Rural Afghanistan, in particular, is quickly coming back to life. While making predictions regarding Afghanistan is a dangerous game, I would venture that, with the possible exception of the major urban centers, Afghanistan will surprise us with how quickly it recovers from the physical effects of the war.

B. Number and Scope of NGO Activities -- The number of NGO projects which have been implemented in eastern Afghanistan is impressive. During my two week trip I saw projects which had been implemented by 30 different NGOs. The scope of NGO activities was also impressive. I saw NGO projects in the areas of water/irrigation, agriculture, animal husbandry, roads, health, assistance for disabled, education, demining, income generation, and housing. I was generally encouraged by what I saw and I returned to Peshawar believing that more of the projects reported in the ACBAR Database of NGO Activities were actually implemented than I had believed when I left for Afghanistan. Clearly, the number and scope of NGO activities will necessitate that NGOs play an important role in the formation and implementation of the rehabilitation strategy for Afghanistan.
C. Need for NGOs to Review and Reconsider Project Areas and Activities -- I was struck by the large number of NGO relief or rehabilitation activities in what appeared to me to be relatively prosperous areas not desperately in need of much direct assistance. In many cases, this was a result of NGO project areas and activities being selected during the war years on the basis of security considerations rather than on the basis of need, number of beneficiaries, cost effectiveness, etc... While security considerations are certainly still important, it is time for NGOs to review their project areas and activities and to justify them on the basis of rehabilitation and development needs. NGOs should consider redirecting their relief and rehabilitation activities to the poorest and most under-served areas of Afghanistan (i.e. central, western, or northern Afghanistan) or the areas most devastated by the war. They should focus on more sustainable development projects which do not depend on the provision of free or highly subsidized inputs in the more prosperous areas.

D. Agricultural Priorities -- Just about everyone I talked to agreed that the top priority in the agricultural sector was cleaning and repairing irrigation systems. Lack of water and fear of mines were the two most common responses I received when I asked why refugees were not returning to an area. Following irrigation, improved seeds and farm traction were commonly given as priority needs.

E. Education -- During my trip several people commented that mental rehabilitation is a much more important task in Afghanistan than physical rehabilitation, and stressed the importance of rebuilding Afghanistan's educational system in this regard. Through such comments, and the repeated requests to build or rebuild schools, I definitely got the impression that education is a lot less controversial an issue inside Afghanistan than it has been in the refugee community in Pakistan. The hardest task ahead will be to restore educational standards. In order to achieve this objective, the first and most difficult step will be to identify or train qualified teachers who are acceptable to the local communities in which they must serve. The second step will be to introduce and gain acceptance for a quality curriculum that can be used. In this regard, the Education Ministry in Kabul should be encouraged to review, and if necessary revise, existing curricula being used and to adopt a national curriculum as soon as possible. The much easier third step will be to build or rebuild schools. This is also important as it will help differentiate between the roles of schools and madrassahs. Rebuilding schools should be the last step as it can be used as an incentive to encourage the community to identify capable teachers and to accept the use of a quality curriculum. Ideally, donors and NGOs should get communities to contribute to the rebuilding of schools. This would reduce the risk of future looting and increase the likelihood that the communities will support the running of the schools.

F. Rebuild Kabul to Kandahar Highway -- Rebuilding the Kabul to Kandahar Highway should be high on the priority list of the Rehabilitation Strategy. Although it would be a major undertaking, I believe it would soon prove to be a very cost-effective endeavor. First, there would be the economic benefit from time savings as travel time from Kabul to Kandahar could be decreased from two days to the six hours which it was before the war. Second, farmers and merchants could get goods to market more quickly, easily, and cheaply. Third, there would be a great reduction in vehicle fuel, repair, and maintenance costs. Fourth, such a labor-intensive project would be an excellent opportunity to employ demobilized personnel in order to encourage and assist their transition from military back to civilian life. Fifth, a major project such as this would infuse cash into local economies and encourage spin-off businesses (i.e. restaurants and hotels for workers, workshops for road building equipment, etc...).

G. Lack of Respect for Public Property -- The very visible signs of the large scale looting of public property following the collapse of the former government was an indication that there is little respect for public property in Afghanistan. Donors and NGOs should bear this in mind before they invest much money in
rebuilding public buildings. Before rebuilding public buildings, measures should be taken to try to minimize
the risk that the buildings will be looted again if there is another collapse of governmental authority. One
such measure would be to require local communities to pay for some of the costs of rebuilding public
buildings. If they have helped pay for the buildings they are more likely to prevent them from being looted.

H. Employment of Demobilized Personnel -- There is an urgent need to provide employment opportunities
to mujahideen in order to encourage their transition from military back to civilian life. NGOs would be well-
suited to implement vocational training and/or income generating projects for former mujahideen. Labor
intensive projects such as road-building would also be important in this respect.
### APPENDIX A

**LIST OF ACRONYMS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACBAR</td>
<td>Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACLU</td>
<td>Afghanistan Construction and Logistics Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACRD</td>
<td>Afghan Center for Rural Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFRANE</td>
<td>Amite Franco-Afghane</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMIA</td>
<td>Alde Medicate Internationale Afghanistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARC</td>
<td>Austrian Relief Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARO</td>
<td>Afghanistan Rehabilitation Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAHI</td>
<td>Care International</td>
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<td>CoAR</td>
<td>Coordination of Afghan Relief</td>
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<td>DACAAR</td>
<td>Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees</td>
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<td>DAI</td>
<td>Development Alternatives, Inc.</td>
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<td>DCA</td>
<td>Dutch Committee for Afghanistan</td>
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<td>ESAR</td>
<td>Engineering Services for Afghan Reconstruction</td>
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<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>HAFO</td>
<td>Helping Afghan Farmers Organization</td>
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<td>HI</td>
<td>Handicap International</td>
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<td>IAHC</td>
<td>Islamic Aid Health Center</td>
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<td>IMC</td>
<td>International Medical Corps</td>
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<td>IRC</td>
<td>International Rescue Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISRA</td>
<td>Islamic Relief Agency</td>
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<td>KAG</td>
<td>Khorasan Assistance Group</td>
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<td>Mercy Corps International</td>
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<td>Medecin du Monde</td>
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<td>MSF</td>
<td>Medicin Sans Frontieres</td>
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<td>MSH</td>
<td>Management Sciences for Health</td>
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<td>MTA</td>
<td>Medical Training for Afghans</td>
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<td>NAC</td>
<td>Norwegian Afghanistan Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>NRC/NCA</td>
<td>Norwegian Refugee Council/ Norwegian Church Aid</td>
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<td>Reconstruction Authority for Afghanistan</td>
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<td>SCA</td>
<td>Swedish Committee for Afghanistan</td>
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<td>SCF(US)</td>
<td>Save the Children (USA)</td>
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<td>Sandy Gall Association for Afghanistan</td>
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<td>START</td>
<td>Short Term Assistance for Rehabilitation Team</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>University of Nebraska, Omaha</td>
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<td>USAID</td>
<td>U.S. Agency for International Development</td>
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<td>VITA</td>
<td>Volunteers In Technical Assistance</td>
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<td>WFP</td>
<td>World Food Programme</td>
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