

**Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit  
Case Study Series**

**Afghanistan Livelihood  
Trajectories  
Evidence from Badakhshan**



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AREU was established in 2002 by the assistance community working in Afghanistan and has a board of directors with representation from donors, the United Nations and other multilateral agencies, and non-governmental organisations. AREU currently receives core funds from the governments of Finland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Specific projects have been funded by the Foundation of the Open Society Institute Afghanistan (FOSIA), the Asia Foundation (TAF), the European Commission (EC), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the World Bank.

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## Abbreviations

AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
ALT	Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories
CDC	Community Development Council
NGO	nongovernmental organisation
NSP	National Solidarity Programme

## Glossary

<i>ailaq</i>	village common grazing or pasture area
<i>arbab</i>	traditional village leader
<i>behaya</i>	behaviour that is judged to be improper or as a breach social norms
<i>ferman</i>	religious instruction from the Aga Khan
<i>haj</i>	pilgrimage to Mecca
<i>haji</i>	someone who has completed the <i>haj</i>
Hanafi	one of the four schools of law of Sunni Islam
<i>haya</i>	behaviour that is judged as proper
<i>imam</i>	religious leader of a mosque or community
<i>jerib</i>	unit of land measurement; approximately one-fifth of a hectare
<i>maulawi</i>	religious teacher
<i>mantiqua</i>	a variable unit of social allegiance or spatial territory that may unite villages
<i>qawm</i>	a form of solidarity that may be based on kinship, residence or occupation
<i>qarz-i-hasana</i>	credit with no interest, credit on good terms
<i>ser</i>	unit of measurement; one ser = approximately seven kilograms
Sharia	Islamic system of law
<i>shura</i>	village council comprised of a group of elders
<i>ulama</i>	educated religious leaders and arbiters of Sharia law
Wahabi	a sect within Sunni Islam
<i>wasita</i>	“connection”; a relationship to someone in a position of power or influence
<i>woliswal</i>	district governor

## Executive Summary

The last three decades have been marked by political and economic turbulence in Badakhshan; households have lived under a state that has been either the enemy, as in the 1980s; largely absent, as in the 1990s, when semi-mobile bandits tended to rule; or dysfunctional, as in the decade since 2000, when rule by the state and other power holders has been predatory and arbitrary. This report explores the livelihood pathways of households under such circumstances from 2002-3 to 2008-9. Researchers visited 24 households in three villages in Badakhshan, eight per village, as part of a larger study looking at livelihood changes in four provinces in Afghanistan.

The study draws attention to the corporate nature of villages, using the concept of “village republics” to identify their capacity to manage themselves and provide public goods—notably security—which the Afghan state and markets have failed to deliver. But village capacity to fulfill this role is variable. In recognition of this discrepancy, the three study villages have been characterised as “developmental,” “warrior” and “defensive” in terms of their behaviour and outcomes. To a degree, the concept of path dependency<sup>1</sup> explains village trajectories; individuals, location, history and ecology have all influenced, in a determinate way, pathways of change.

Findings show that most of the study households are worse off than they were prior to 2001, although most experienced a brief period of relative prosperity based on the one market choice available: opium poppy. In all three villages, many of the poorer households rationed food during 2008-09 in order to survive. Decline in their circumstances is evidenced by the disposal of key assets. Some households, either through larger asset holdings or good luck, have managed to maintain status quo. Of the five households that prospered, only two did so through agriculture. There is a limited agricultural future in Badakhshan’s mountain economy, and there is a danger that marginal increases in productivity will keep people on the land but keep them poor, thus creating an agricultural poverty trap. What Badakhshan needs is more employment opportunities.

Five detailed case studies investigate the increasing difficulty in getting married, the role of marriage and its consequences for its participants. The imperative to marry and the desire to establish a strong, large household are central to achieving physical and economic security. While social norms clearly determine gendered specialisation within the household (reducing the need for negotiation over roles and individual benefits), there is more room for manoeuvre than expected. But allegiance to the household as an institution is absolute, given the economic (and to some extent physical) security that it provides, and individuals are aware of the compromises to autonomy that this entails. Rather than seeing the Afghan household and village as exceptional and problematic in their formation and operation, it would be wise to recognise that, despite their variability and costs they impose, they are the only stable institutions available. They deserve less judgement, more understanding and better support.

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1 Path dependency is the idea that previous events predetermine subsequent possibilities.





# 1. Introduction

From 2002-04, in partnership with seven nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit implemented an 18-month European Commission-funded research project monitoring the livelihoods of 390 households across 21 villages in seven districts in seven provinces of Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup> The selected provinces and districts reflected a variety of agro-ecological and economic circumstances. The aim of the research was to build an understanding of rural livelihoods in Afghanistan on the grounds that much current policy and programming practice was based on preconceptions of what people in rural areas do, and that it focused on delivery of programmes while paying little attention to the context within which people lived.

The key findings of that research pointed to a considerable degree of diversification in rural household economies, with many drawing a significant part of their income (in cash and kind) from non-farm labour, since migration was common.<sup>3</sup> The majority of poor households acquired most of their grain from the market, and non-farm labour was their most important source of income. This finding challenged the widespread assumption, then and now, that 80% of the population is dependent on agriculture.

The construction of identifiable household data sets made it possible to return years later to the same households to find out what had happened to them. In 2008, AREU secured new funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) of the United Kingdom to conduct research on how these households' circumstances had changed, and to consider what factors might have brought such changes about.<sup>4</sup> The new research explored (1) livelihood trajectories, which can be defined as "the consequences of the changing way in which individuals construct a livelihood over time,"<sup>5</sup> and (2) poverty outcomes under the conditions of variable but continuing insecurity in Afghanistan. The fieldwork was undertaken under the auspices of and in close collaboration with the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF)'s Badakhshan programme.

Five of the original seven provinces were selected for the new study: Badakhshan, Faryab, Kandahar, Herat and Sar-i-Pul. Ghazni and Laghman were dropped at the design stage because of high insecurity. Herat was discontinued after the restudy commenced (in May 2008) because of continuing insecurity in the Hari Rud Valley. In Faryab, the research approach had to be modified also due to insecurity.

Four major questions have structured this research:

1. What have been the livelihood trajectories and welfare outcomes of the Afghan households in the study throughout the years? How are these differentiated by gender, socioeconomic position, community and context?
2. What practices have households implemented, under diverse contexts of conflict, in relation to market choices and use of social and human capital to cope with insecurity? To what extent have these practices mitigated or reproduced insecurity and contributed to or undermined resilience? How has insecurity affected household strategies and welfare outcomes?
3. What do these livelihood trajectories tell us about the meaning of local formal and

<sup>2</sup> The provinces are Badakhshan, Faryab, Ghazni, Herat, Kandahar, Laghman and Sar-i-Pul.

<sup>3</sup> Jo Grace and Adam Pain, *Rethinking Rural Livelihoods in Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> "Development in the Raw: Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories," Grant RES-167-25-0285, ESRC.

<sup>5</sup> D.K. Bagchi, P. Blaikie, J. Cameron, M. Chattopadhyay, N. Gyawali and D. Seddon, "Conceptual and Methodological Challenges in the Study of Livelihoods Trajectories: Case Studies in Eastern India and Western Nepal," *Journal of International Development* 10 (1998): 457.

informal structures and how different households and communities have adapted to and engaged with state absence? What does this tell us about the nature of resilience, its scope and reach, and the inclusiveness of its mechanisms?

4. To what extent do trajectories of change reflect either the influence of pre-existing structures or the capacity of individuals or communities to bring about changes through collective action? If there have been shifts, where, for whom and how have they been possible?

Part of the argument made in the research proposal was that much of the effort in the Afghanistan state-building exercise has focused on building formal state institutions and establishing formal legal structures of governance, law, security and markets. Little attention has been paid to existing traditional institutions. At best it has been assumed that they are nonexistent: that there are no customary institutions for dispute resolution, for example, or that credit was not available because of the absence of formal financial institutions. More often informal institutions have been seen as problematic: unaccountable, unjust or inequitable. Much of the thinking behind the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), for example, is based on a negative view of existing authority structures. NSP has sought to replace them with formal village structures (Community Development Councils or CDCs) as part of a process of building democratic structures from the village upwards. Another strand of thinking sees informality as illegal and criminal, a view to which the dynamics of the opium economy have undoubtedly contributed.

Whatever position one might take on informality, the question for Afghanistan has always been not “why are things so bad?” but “why are they not worse?” (This does not deny existing poverty levels.) The initial humanitarian agenda after 2001 had assumptions of destruction and disaster despite field evidence that did not support such views.<sup>6</sup> While there was evidence of chronic malnutrition, very little acute malnutrition was found. Grain markets did not fail, debunking claims of availability failure. Claims of a cash crisis<sup>7</sup> and a dearth of credit<sup>8</sup> were also not supported by the evidence.<sup>9</sup> In short, rural households have been more resilient than acknowledged. The nature of this resilience, the social practices that have contributed to it, and the extent to which it has been affected by reconstruction over the last several years have been a critical focus of this study.

A key lesson that can be drawn from this Badakhshan case study is that institutions outside the formal concerns of state-building—the village and the household—have proved to be remarkably durable and capable of providing a degree of security and welfare for most individuals. This is hardly surprising, given the dysfunctional nature of the state and the unruliness of the markets. But field evidence points to the corporate nature of both village and household and their capacity to provide physical security.<sup>10</sup>

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6 A. Pain and J. Sutton, “Introduction: Reconstructing Agriculture in Afghanistan,” in *Reconstructing Agriculture in Afghanistan*, edited by A. Pain and J. Sutton, (Rome and Rugby: FAO and Practical Action, 2007), 1-10.

7 S. Lautze, E. Stites, N. Nojumi and F. Najimi, *Qaht-e-Pool: “A Cash Famine”: Food Insecurity in Afghanistan, 1999-2002* (Medford, MA: Feinstein International Famine Centre, Tufts University, 2002), <http://famine.tufts.edu/research/natsios.html>.

8 S. Rasmusson, “The Current Situation of Rural Finance in Afghanistan,” in *Rural Finance in Afghanistan: The Challenges of the Opium Economy* (World Bank, 2005), 20-24.

9 F. Klijn and A. Pain, *Finding the Money: Informal Credit Practices in Rural Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2007).

10 The term “corporate” implies a degree of unity and shared responsibility, in this case for public goods at village or household level. A distinction is made between “pure” public goods (those that cannot be competed for and from which others cannot be excluded, such as fresh air) and “collective” or “social” goods such as education and health, which can be delivered as private goods but are usually done by government. In this study, the term “public good” is used in a general sense to include security,

This is not an assessment of the quality of that provision, which is variable, but more an observation that these informal institutions have offered far more than anything else currently available.

The second theme to emerge from the Badakhshan study is that from a poverty perspective, particularly in relation to household economies, food security and asset bases, most households are distinctly worse off since 2002-3. This has not been a long-term trend, not least given the rise and fall of the opium economy in Badakhshan. But the economic insecurity of living in a marginal mountain economy has not for most been offset by the development efforts in the span of five years. This is not true for all, and there are important differences between locations and between households within locations. But the ability of Badakhshan's rural economy to support its inhabitants is a major question; the need for rural employment is considerable, but it is doubtful that it can be found for many in Badakhshan.

Section 2 summarises the methodology used in this study and the sources of evidence on which it is based. Section 3 analyses the changing context within which villages and households have lived, drawing on history before 2001 as well as an analysis of political and economic changes. Section 4 makes the case for viewing villages as whole, corporate structures and shows the relevance of this approach to understanding the way in which villages engage with the outside world and structure the lives of those within them. This includes a specific discussion on customary institutions within the villages, how they have evolved and the role that they play. Section 5 explores household economic trajectories, investigating contrasts between villages and between households within the villages. Section 6 discusses the critical role of the household within this setting and individuals' enduring commitment to it despite its constraints. Finally, Section 7 responds to the study's key research questions.

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dispute resolution procedures, education, and so on. The term "household" refers to the smaller nuclear household unit and "joint household" to multiple households living within one compound.

## 2. Methodology

This section has three parts. The first discusses the general research approach and the different scales at which data has been gathered. The second presents the household interview procedures. The third provides summary information on the three villages and eight households interviewed within each village.

### 2.1 Research approach

The core of the evidence collection consisted of detailed household interviews which sought details of changes in household circumstances since 2002-03. By utilising a panel set of data, this approach tracked long-term change on chronic poverty<sup>11</sup> and emphasised the investigation of household trajectories. It is largely inductive, drawn from a “muddy footed” empiricism with no prior assumptions about the causes, benefits and costs of identified changes. In this the research sought qualitative depth, working through selected case studies and generating conclusions from them.<sup>12</sup>

This methodology contrasts with the more conventional multihousehold cross-sectional surveys—for example, the Afghanistan National Vulnerability and Risk Assessment<sup>13</sup>—that are deductive in approach, with data quantitative (collected largely through structured questionnaires), and understanding of causalities generated through statistical techniques and hypothesis testing. Such large-sample surveys are essentially broad but thin and look for generalisable truths; this research here, on the other hand, focuses on variability and difference and aims for qualitative depth in order to investigate causalities.

While this work is empirical, it nevertheless draws its conceptual approach from an interest in social structures and the relations they involve. It does not presume escape from poverty as based on individual action and choice. Rather it sees poverty as fundamentally about relationships,<sup>14</sup> social inequalities and relations of power offering both freedom and constraints. Thus the lives of people as individuals and household members and the relations they have within and outside of households must be understood in terms of the institutional setting that structures norms, constraints and social relations. These in turn are dynamic and can be transformed by larger political and economic processes.

Accordingly, the research sought to understand not only changes within households but also in the context within which people lead their lives. To do so, it drew on the previous research conducted in Badakhshan to build an understanding of village history, changes in village economy, changes in village authority structures and engagement with the outer world over the last three decades. As key issues emerged from some of the household interviews, for example on the theme of *wasita*,<sup>15</sup> interview guides were adapted to incorporate them, and key informants were also interviewed about these concepts. An initial exercise in context-setting was undertaken prior to the household interviews in order to identify key themes to be addressed in the interviews. This context-setting

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11 Lucia Da Corta, “The Political Economy of Agrarian Change: Dinosaur of Phoenix?” in *The Comparative Political Economy of Development: Africa and Asia*, ed. Barbara Harriss-White and Judith Heyer (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

12 Bent Flyvbjerg, “Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research,” *Qualitative Enquiry* 17, no. 2 (2006): 219-45.

13 Central Statistics Organisation, *The National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2007/8: A Profile of Afghanistan* (Kabul: Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2009).

14 David Mosse, “Power and the Durability of Poverty: A Critical Exploration of the Links between Culture, Marginality and Chronic Poverty,” Working Paper 107 (Manchester: Chronic Poverty Research Centre, 2007).

15 “Wasita,” which means “connection,” is a relationship to someone in a position of power or influence.

was further developed during debriefing exercises after each round of interviews. Once the household interviews in the third village were completed, interviewers revisited all three villages to follow up on major issues that had emerged.

## 2.2 Interview procedure

The Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), a partner NGO, recruited a household interview team consisting of two married couples. The household interview procedure followed a six-stage process:

1. *Household profile*: In the original 2002-3 study, households within each village were divided into three groups based on their relative wealth. (These wealth groups are subjective, relative to a specific village and are not absolute measures.) About 20 households per village were randomly selected, with the number drawn from each wealth group proportional to that group's relative size in the village. Using the 2002 base household data, a household profile was prepared for each of the originally interviewed households summarising basic data on household composition and economy in 2002-03.
2. *Introductory (or preliminary) interviews*: The interview teams were introduced to the village by AKF staff and then conducted a series of introductory discussions with all the households from the original study that could be found. These preliminary interviews, informed by the household profiles, explored changes that had happened in the household (for example, in household composition and economy) and looked for evidence that household fortunes had improved, remained the same or declined. These preliminary interview transcripts were translated and compared with the 2002 base household profiles.
3. *Household selection*: Based on the preliminary interviews, a subsample of eight households were selected from each village for further interviews, proportional to the number of households in each wealth group in the original 20-household sample. The goal for the selection was first to find household contrasts in terms of changing fortunes across and within the wealth groups and then, within these, to choose households of contrasting size, structure and age.
4. *Household interview guides*: Based on the selections, detailed interview guides were prepared for each household. The guides identified key themes and issues to be followed up over the four interviews held with the household, two with the man and two with the woman. Each guide had eight themes: household composition and structure, household history, home and services, land and agricultural production, income-generating work, credit and savings, links with government and informal systems, and the wider context. But each was also shaped to the individual household, drawing on changes reported by the household in the preliminary interview and key events throughout the years. Based on the household profile, the preliminary interview and transcripts from the first interview, a detailed household history was compiled.

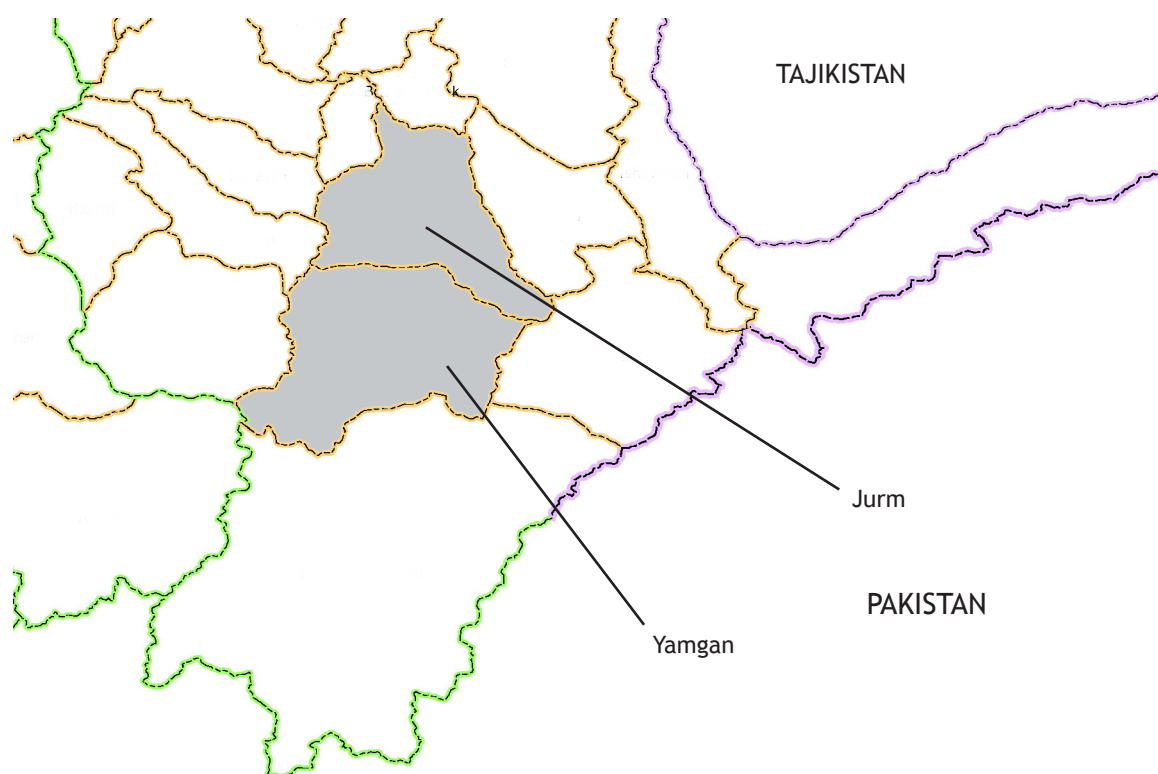
In the first village, the field team prepared the interview guides. The guides then went through English translation, author's comments, and subsequent revisions in response to the comments. This took time, and there had been a tendency to rush through the whole interview guide in the first interview. This meant that details were not fully probed and that subject material not been fully examined in the first interview. Thus, they had to be covered again in the second interview. Accordingly, in the other two villages, the interview guides were prepared for the teams and structured to provide separate thematic material for the first and second interviews. This appears to have led to more detailed questioning and probing in the interviews.

5. *Household interviews*: Household interviews were carried out by the research teams, usually with the head of the household and the oldest woman. This was not always the case, and sometimes sons or daughters or daughters-in-law were interviewed when these informants were away or sick. Team members rotated the tasks of interviewing and note-taking with each interview. The transcripts were then typed up and emailed for comment and feedback.
6. *Debriefing*: After the first and second round of interviews, debriefing was carried out both by email and by direct discussion either with an AREU staff member or with the author. Some of the debriefing involved the clarification of key issues on a household-by-household basis. Other issues were more analytical in intent, seeking systematic household comparisons in relation to key themes. Some issues were more conceptual, debating the meanings of issues and terms and the way in which ideas were presented. For example, the interviewing teams were asked to give their impressions of the individuals that they were talking to and how they responded to them, how either men or women talked about their spouses and what the interview teams sensed about household relations. These discussions revealed some important issues. In one case it was evident that a female team member did not approve of a particular woman whose behaviour was judged to be *behaya* (improper), which led to a long discussion on the distinction between observation and judgement. In another case the interview team was unwilling to record an explanation given by a woman because of its sensitivity. Inevitably, as the relations between the interview team and AREU staff grew, these discussions became more open and deeper.

Great care was taken in both translating and extracting the opinions, emotions and thoughts from the final household transcripts. Indeed, it is one matter for the interviewee to make a statement and for the interviewer to grasp the motives and subtleties behind the statement; it is another matter for an interviewer to capture everything said when the ideal was a verbatim transcription. Further complications arise when translating concepts expressed in Dari into English. Thus, because each step is an interpretative act, reading a transcript in English and drawing accurate conclusions requires considerable caution.

## 2.3 Characteristics of villages and households

Figure 1 locates the districts of Jurm and Yamgan, in which the three study villages (A, B, C) are situated. Table 1 summarises some basic features of each village and points to key contrasts among them. These include the relatively low altitude of Village B, the low household density in Village C, the relatively high number of joint households (i.e., number of households per family) in Village B, and the differences in arable land area (rainfed and irrigated) per household between the villages. Table 2 describes the size and composition (joint or single) of the eight sampled households in each village, listed by wealth group. The household codes are designated with a corresponding village letter (A, B or C) along with a double-digit numeric code based on the original survey coding.

**Figure 1. Map of Badakhshan****Table 1. Basic characteristics of villages**

	Village A	Village B	Village C
Altitude (meters above sea level)	1,925	1,232	1,976
Number of families	302	178	44
Number of households	323	260	53
Households per family	1.07	1.46	1.20
Irrigated land ( <i>jeribs</i> )*	800	234	50
Rainfed land ( <i>jeribs</i> )	1,200	66	200
Irrigated land (percent of total)	40%	78%	20%
Total land per household ( <i>jeribs</i> )	6.62	1.68	5.68
Irrigated land per household ( <i>jeribs</i> )	2.65	1.31	1.14

Source: AKF Village Databases; \* 5 *jeribs* = 1 hectare.

N.B. The Aga Khan Foundation, following Badakhshani practice, uses the term “family” to describe the nuclear unit and “household” for the larger unit comprised of several nuclear families living together and sharing income and expenditure. For the purposes of this report, “household” describes the nuclear unit.

**Table 2. Household size and composition by village and wealth group**

Wealth group	Village A households	Village B households	Village C households
I	A38 (12, S)	B70 (19, J) B69 (11, J)	C57 (20, J) C58 (7, J)
II	A23 (8, J → S+) A24 (11, J) A34 (18, J)	B64 (16, J) B75 (5, J)	C43 (5, S+) C49 (10, S) C56 (11, J)
III	A22 (5, S+) A27 (4, S) A33 (8, S) A36 (11, S+)	B77 (9, J) B66 (11, J) B65 (4, J → S+) B74 (9, S+)	C45 (11, J) C46 (3, S) C52 (7, S)

J = joint, S = single, S+ = additional household members (e.g., mother-in-law living with the household), J → S = recent separation

## 3. Badakhshan Province

### 3.1 Introduction

Badakhshan, a northeastern province of Afghanistan, was established in its current shape in 1963 when it was separated from Katagan Province. With high mountains and steep river valleys, it is one of the larger provinces in the country, although sparsely populated, remote and relatively underdeveloped. To its south, the Hindu Kush effectively cuts it off from the rest of Afghanistan. In the past, access to Badakhshan was restricted to the Anjuman Pass, which connected it with Panjshir Valley. Even now there is only one motorable road into the province (from Takhar Province) which remains unpaved and subject to closure during winter.

Tajiks and Uzbeks, largely Sunni Muslims, account for approximately 90% of the population. There are other small linguistic groups, many of whom are Ismaili, often living in the remoter districts including the Wakhan Corridor, Ishkashim, Shighnan and Zebak.

The province has a history of chronic food insecurity, as reported by a 1992 UNIDATA profile:

Before the [Soviet] war, local agricultural production met only 50% of the province's need. Even in 1976, a UNDP report described that the people of Badakhshan were living in an emergency situation, especially with regard to the condition of food supply. This situation got worse during the war. At present [1992] local produce is only enough to fulfil the needs of one-third of the population. Animal husbandry, another source of income and livelihood in the province, lost 40 percent of production due to war.<sup>16</sup>

Drawing on surveys carried out by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan in the late 1980s, UNIDATA noted the relatively small percentage of farming households that had a grain surplus and the relatively large number (80-90% or more) with a grain deficit. Paul Clarke and John Seaman<sup>17</sup> drew attention to the fact that in the higher parts of Badakhshan, grain had historically been obtained in large part by exchange achieved through seasonal wage labour outside the district or through the sale of livestock. In the lower areas, grain had been obtained through opium production, livestock sales, and seasonal wage labour in other provinces as well as through work in the mining sector. In summary, Badakhshan has historically been one of the more marginal provinces in Afghanistan. According to the 2005 National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, it has one of the highest proportions of population beneath the poverty line of any Afghan province.<sup>18</sup>

However, one key legacy since the 1950s was an early investment in education. Although precise data is difficult to obtain, one source noted the presence in 1974 of 197 schools for boys and 27 schools for girls.<sup>19</sup> Further, the early presence of an educated elite in the province is widely cited<sup>20</sup> and evidenced from educated Badakhshanis' substantial role

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16 UNIDATA, *Afghanistan: Badakhshan Province: A Socio-Economic Profile* (Kabul: United Nations Development Programme/Office of Project Services [UNOPS], 1992), 18.

17 Paul Clarke and John Seaman, "A Preliminary Guide to the Food Economies of Afghanistan" (mimeo, Islamabad: World Food Programme Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping Project, 1998).

18 The most recent NRVA data did not provide poverty incidence data by province at the time of writing. See Central Statistics Organisation, *The National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2007/8*.

19 M.N. Shahrani, "Causes and Context of Responses to the Saur Revolution in Badakhshan," in *Revolutions and Rebellions in Afghanistan: Anthropological Perspectives*, 139-169 (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1984).

20 Antonio Guistozzi and Dominique Orsini, "Centre-Periphery Relations in Afghanistan: Badakhshan



in the formation of many of the leftist parties during the 1970s. As this study will show, early support for education is one of the characteristics of Village A's trajectory.

Badakhshan's historical legacy, particularly the conflicts from 1978 onwards, has significantly shaped the post-2001 political economy of the province. The following section explores the political and economic changes from 1978 to 2001 and considers their influence on developments after 2001. The story centres on the heartland of Badakhshan: Faizabad and the greater Jurm Valley.

### 3.2 Badakhshan 1978-2001

The period from 1978 to 2001 can be divided into two phases. The first lasted from 1978 until the fall of President Najibullah and the capture of Kabul by the mujahiddin forces in 1992. This period was characterised by conflict between the government and the mujahiddin as well as between the different mujahiddin parties. The second period saw the rise of Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Massoud as key players in the government from 1992 to 1996, when the Taliban captured Kabul. They then established themselves as opposition to the Taliban in Badakhshan and Panjshir, holding out until the Taliban fell from power in late 2001. Badakhshan, even though economically marginal, played a central role in the conflicts between 1978-2001 because of its key personalities.

#### 1978-1992

Although some key figures in the leftist parties initially supportive of the new 1978 government came from the educated elite, some of the earliest resistance to it also came from Badakhshan. One of the constituent parties of the 1978 government, *Sitami Milli*, had a strong Badakhshani membership but fell out with the government and took up arms against it, leading to the first organised attack against its Baharak district centretown.<sup>21</sup> This led to the killing by the government of many of the local elite. The head of Household A38's older brother was killed at this time. This response combined with ill-judged and poorly implemented land reforms led to the rise of the main resistance parties that shaped the province's political landscape. Foremost among these was the *Jamiat-i-Islami*, particularly in the early phases of the war, but others soon emerged, including *Hizb-i-Islami*.<sup>22</sup>

The rise of the mujahiddin movement led to an escalating conflict over the next eight to nine years. The government gained an insecure hold over the main districts of Jurm and Ishkashim and the surrounding valley floors while the mujahiddin largely controlled the surrounding mountains and lateral valleys. Many of the participant households experienced bombing raids and direct attacks during this period. This was particularly true in Village B, which, despite its proximity to Jurm, successfully resisted these attacks throughout the period of Soviet occupation. The head of Household B75, for example, reported losing 2,000 *sers*<sup>23</sup> of wheat and 400 sheep in one attack. Many households in Villages A and B experienced direct bombing attacks and the deaths of neighbours or relatives. This period is not recalled as one of particular economic hardship, because good rainfall and reliable cropping ensured food supplies. Many households, though, particularly in Villages B and C, commented more on the demands by the mujahiddin for food and lodging; these fell particularly on the richer members of the community.

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between Patrimonialism and Institution Building," *Central Asian Survey* 28, no. 1 (2009): 1-16.

21 Shahrani, "Causes and Context," 160.

22 Giustozzi and Orsini, "Centre-Periphery Relations."

23 1 ser is approximately 7 kilograms.

Government reprisals against the traditional village elites were matched by actions taken by the mujahiddin against individuals and public goods seen to be emblematic of the government. Targeted in particular during this period were teachers and schools. Village C had no schools. Village A authorities managed to protect its only school, and education continued to function throughout the period, a point that is discussed further in Section 4. In Village B, the mujahiddin attacked the school, destroying it and killing the teachers; education stopped and was not resumed until after 2001, nearly a 20-year gap.

### **1992-2001**

With the fall of the communist government in 1992 and Rabbani's uneasy and conflict-ridden rise to power, a broad division of power seems to have emerged within Badakhshan. On the one hand, as Antonio Giustozzi and Dominique Orsini described it,<sup>24</sup> Rabbani remained more of a titular head over a group of regional and local power holders who were continually jostling for power and for control of the developing opium economy.<sup>25</sup> Rabbani's *Jamiat-i-Islami* did not have complete sway over Badakhshan, and despite the nominal alliance of Massoud with the *Jamiat-i-Islami*, Massoud, through his coordination council (*Shura-i-Nazar*) and in particular through his alliance with a key commander, Najmuddin Wasiq, maintained a separate power base in the province. According to Giustozzi and Orsini, the north and south of Badakhshan were more or less aligned with Massoud through key commanders, while the central districts were more affiliated, again through local commanders, with Rabbani. It was at this time, during the 1990s, that key local commanders were rewarded through the conversion of subdistricts into full districts, giving them formal positions as district governors, and Yamgan and Khosh both separated from Jurm.

While conflict and shifting alliances between commanders were common, according to various sources<sup>26</sup> and informants, Massoud, through Najmuddin Wasiq (until the latter's assassination in 1999), appears to have maintained more of what could be characterised as a developmental perspective, with schools being supported and teachers being paid. The rise of Baharak district centre at this stage owes much to the efforts of Najmuddin. Some villages, either through accident, location or deliberate choice, managed to remain relatively united. This was the case in all three study villages, although there were divisions in Village A; these will be discussed in Section 4. Other villages found themselves on the front lines between warring factions as different power holders competed within the village. The Khustak Valley, in which Village B lies, was divided between various competing parties, although Village B itself was relatively secure. One village, which lies on the southerly bank of the Kokcha River close to the Khustak Valley, has been racked by conflict as a result of a split in political allegiances between two key power holders. The armed conflict that raged between these two factions during the 1990s, aided by outside players, led to considerable destruction, looting of property and loss of life, and conflict continued beyond 2001.<sup>27</sup>

During the 1990s, there were considerable economic consequences of the rise of a local commander economy. There were various reports of the looting or seizing of control of resources by locally powerful commanders or villages. For example, Village C lost

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24 Giustozzi and Orsini, "Centre-Periphery Relations."

25 Jonathan Goodhand, "From Holy War to Opium War? A Case Study of the Opium Economy in North-Eastern Afghanistan," *Central Asian Survey* 19, no. 2 (2000), 265-80.

26 Giles Dorransoro, *Revolution Unending: Afghanistan 1979 to the Present* (London: Hurst, 2000).

27 Adam Pain, "The Impact of the Opium Poppy Economy on Household Livelihoods: Evidence from the Wakhan Corridor and Khustak Valley in Badakhshan" (Report to the Aga Khan Development Network, Kabul, 2004), 14.

access to some of its customary pasture, which was seized by other villages for rainfed cultivation. Others found their livestock herds subject to predation by commanders and so rapidly reduced their herds.<sup>28</sup> The cost of living began to rise with the emergence of a siege economy in Badakhshan due to the blockades imposed by the surrounding Taliban forces. A deepening drought and the behaviour of unruly local commanders who imposed checkpoints and taxed goods being transported contributed to economic hardship. The cost of credit began to increase at a time when the demand for it, through increasing food insecurity, was also on the rise.<sup>29</sup> Many households began to experience acute economic hardship and had to mortgage or sell land and take on increasing levels of debt. These difficulties pre-dated the rise of the opium economy, which emerged in Badakhshan by 2000.

### 3.3 Badakhshan 2001-2009

Two interlinked features characterise the political economy of post-2001 Badakhshan: first, the consolidation of patrimonial politics, driven by relations between the province and Kabul and shaped by the rivalry between Rabbani and President Karzai, and second, the rise and fall of the opium economy.

With respect to the former, Guistozzi and Orsini have characterised the period 2002-2005 (like 1992-2001) as “a system of regulated anarchy...where a degree of stability was maintained through a balance of power”<sup>30</sup> whereby Rabbani and *Jamiat-i-Islami* maintained a somewhat weak and decentralised patrimonial system. It is estimated that between 70-75% of the province was under the control of loose alliances of local military leaders, 10-15% was partially under state control, and 10-15% was totally outside state control.<sup>31</sup> While there was some disarmament, it was far from complete, as much of the jostling for power centred on the control of the opium trade and its profits.

Since 2005 President Karzai appears to have increasingly intervened in Badakhshan “to replace local systems of power and patronage...with an alternative one dependent on Kabul”<sup>32</sup> and to have specifically supported Zalmay Khan, who became a member of the Wolesi Jirga at the end of 2005. Zalmay Khan, who originates from Jurm, has had a mobile political history. He initially supported Massoud and Shura-i Nazar, then gave allegiance to Rabbani and *Jamiat-i-Islami*, before finally attaching his political fortunes to Karzai. As Guistozzi and Orsini put it, “he has shown an inclination to prioritise his own personal interests over Kabul.”<sup>33</sup> Many key informants perceived him to be corrupt and largely interested in self-enrichment and consolidating a family power base. In 2007 Zalmay Khan gained control over the lapis lazuli mine in Kuran Wa Munja<sup>34</sup> and appointed his brother to manage it. He has been reported to have intervened to ensure districts central to his power base retain his appointments of the *woliswal* (district administrator) and the police chief, which in Jurm was his cousin.<sup>35</sup> His family has also been implicated in involvement in the drugs trade.

28 Adam Pain, *Opium Poppy and Informal Credit* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2008), 25.

29 Pain, *Opium Poppy and Informal Credit*, 24-27.

30 Guistozzi and Orsini, “Centre-Periphery Relations,” 9.

31 J. Kohler, *Assessing Peace and Conflict Potential in the Target Region of the GTZ Central Asia and Northern Afghanistan Programme to Foster Food Security, Regional Cooperation and Stability* (Berlin: Analysis Research Consulting/ Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit [GTZ] GmbH, 2004).

32 Guistozzi and Orsini, “Centre-Periphery Relations,” 11.

33 Guistozzi and Orsini, “Centre-Periphery Relations,” 13.

34 Guistozzi and Orsini, “Centre-Periphery Relations,” 12.

35 Guistozzi and Orsini, “Centre-Periphery Relations,” 12.

Guistozzi and Orsini noted that Zalmay Khan, supported by key informants, has had support from Karzai but this support has not been absolute. It would appear that Karzai has hedged his bets by also supporting, to a degree, his potential opponents. The outcome of all the political manoeuvring and patrimonial politics has been a gradual destabilisation with these gestures more concerned with gaining and maintaining power and promoting short-term interests rather than building a credible state presence.

The opium economy was on the rise by 2000, although note should be made of the historical role of the crop in the province in several of the minor side valleys. Farmers in Khosh, Khustak and Kamangaran have a long history of opium cultivation; they recall selling the crop to the state trading company in Faizabad during the 1950s.<sup>36</sup> During the 1990s, Badakhshan provided an estimated 2-6% of the national crop area. With the ban by the Taliban in 2001 and the subsequent price rise, the crop area expanded from an estimated 6,342 ha in the 2000-2001 cultivation season to 15,607 ha in 2004 before falling to 3,642 ha in 2007.<sup>37</sup> Thereafter it declined sharply, driven partly by the threat of eradication but also by shifts in terms of trade between opium and wheat and other crops.<sup>38</sup>

For most households, this expansion was a time of unparalleled prosperity: the years of the “opium revolution” or “opium festival.”<sup>39</sup> It brought income either directly from cultivation on owned or sharecropped land or indirectly by providing new employment opportunities. It was a time of food security, investment and debt relief, and many households were able to recover from debts incurred during the drought.

Nevertheless, the benefits of opium were differentiated, with landowners gaining most from its cultivation, but the multiplier effects on the rural economy were significant, and most people gained something. There were also important spatial differences between villages located in the valleys with more secure irrigation and those located in more marginal places with less favourable natural resources. Some villages (Villages A and C) came late to direct cultivation, labourers gaining the skills for cultivation by working on lands elsewhere in the province and then putting them to use in their home villages.

The period of opium prosperity was relatively short-lived, and in 2005-06 the opium economy began to decline. This quickly had effects on the rural economy as a whole. Those who had gained from farm employment opportunities were first affected, as the demand for farm labour and the wage rates rapidly declined. There are, however, accounts of households with opium stocks who gradually sold them off in subsequent years. The decline in purchasing power rapidly affected the markets that had grown up around the injection of cash in the rural economy. Baharak and Jurm, which had rapidly grown into vibrant district markets, fell into decline. Many households used opium income to invest in assets such as house reconstruction and livestock. However, two drier years, 2007 and particularly 2008, when the rainfed crop failed and grain prices rapidly rose, exhausted many of the gains from the opium economy, and many households found their standard of living sinking to its pre-opium state, if not worse. The year 2009 was better agriculturally, because farmers successfully cultivated crops on rainfed land; but for those with limited or no land, making ends meet has become increasingly difficult.

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36 Pain, *Opium Poppy and Informal Credit*, 19-20.

37 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Afghan Ministry of Counter Narcotics, *Opium Survey* (Vienna and Kabul: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC] and Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2007).

38 David Mansfield, *Governance, Security and Economic Growth: The Determinants of Opium Poppy Cultivation in the Districts of Jurm and Baharak in Badakhshan* (Kabul: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit [GTZ] GmbH and Aga Khan Development Network, 2007).

39 Pain, *Opium Poppy and Informal Credit*, 27-31.

### 3.4 Discussion

Three dimensions distinguish Badakhshan and its political and economic trajectory over the last 30 years. First is its identity as a remote and poor mountainous province on the periphery of Afghanistan, although one with mining resources. Second is a political trajectory that, through key personalities and leaders, placed it on the central political stage during the 1990s. This was reinforced by its position as a locus of opposition to Taliban rule between 1996 and 2001. Since 2001, political processes and contests for power have been played out within a patrimonial system that has perpetuated political instability in the province. Third is a turbulent economic trajectory characterised by a war economy during the 1990s, drought, the rise of an opium economy that brought unprecedented prosperity for many, and then its collapse and a subsequent drought and price rise that brought many households back to pre-opium economic conditions. The following section will explore how the study villages have weathered these changes.

## 4. Village Republics

### 4.1 Introduction

This section focuses on the village as a unit of analysis. There are several reasons for doing this. First, from a conceptual viewpoint, the key components of a country's institutional landscape can be characterised as the state, the market, the village and the household.<sup>40</sup> However, Afghanistan has a complex and spatially variable institutional structure outside of the state and the market; this includes structures that may unite or divide villages such as ethnicity, tribe, *qawm* and *mantiqua*. A *qawm* is a form of solidarity that may be based on kinship, residence or occupation that can cross tribal and even ethnic boundaries; a *mantiqua* is a variable unit of social and territorial space that may unite people across villages.<sup>41</sup> All these entities, to varying degrees and in different ways, establish rules and norms that regulate people's actions and moderate the workings and influence of other institutions. Much of the state-building effort in Afghanistan has focused on the architecture and performance of the state and its constituent parts and to a lesser degree on markets. But the nature and role of the multilayered institutions outside the state and market, and particularly those of the village and household, have been of less interest. Thus, this section focuses on the village; the household is discussed in Section 6.

The National Solidarity Programme (NSP), with its model of community-driven development, has sought to build stronger communities to engage with the state and market. Whether it has achieved what it claims and whether the assumptions on which it is based are robust is a separate issue.<sup>42</sup> But not only does the NSP often create several "communities" within a village (to fit with programme operational guidelines), but its use of the term "community" carries certain normative assumptions about values of democracy, participation and social transformation as well as a judgement on systems that already exist. While the terms "community" and "village" are often used interchangeably, here the term "village" is used as a neutral term simply to describe a unit of residence to which households consider they belong. A village may have properties or forms of collective organisation that may give it community-like attributes, but that is not assumed.

Second, as Section 3 has argued, for the last three decades most households in Badakhshan have lived under conditions in which the state has been either the enemy (in the 1980s), largely absent and supplanted by semi-mobile bandits (in the 1990s), or predatory and arbitrary and characterised more by dysfunctionality than delivery (in the 2000s). Equally, markets, both for opium and for other commodities,<sup>43</sup> have been subject to all sorts of informal regulation and predatory action by agents of the state and informal powerholders. Thus, the two key institutions that in the Western world (to varying degrees) are the source of social welfare for households—the state and the market—have failed to fulfill this role in Afghanistan; worse, they have been the greatest sources of insecurity. Thus, individuals have been left with two key institutions with which to secure their lives: the household and the immediately surrounding social relations usually to be

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40 G. Wood and I. Gough, "A Comparative Welfare Regime Approach to Global Social Policy," *World Development* 34, no. 10 (2006): 1696-1712.

41 See K. Mielke and C. Schetter, "'Where is the Village?' Local Perceptions and Development Approaches in Kunduz Province," *Asien* 104 (July 2007), 71-87.

42 See Adam Pain and S.M. Shah, *Policymaking in Agriculture and Rural Development in Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2009), 36-37.

43 S. Lister and A. Pain, *Trading in Power: The Politics of "Free" Markets in Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2004).

found in the village. This is particularly true given the degree of marriage endogamous (internal) to villages and the subsequent web of household relationships created. This justifies a focus on the village as a potential source of social welfare.

Third, the evidence points to the existence of the three study villages that are very different. What is the source of that variation, and what are its implications for the welfare of households in the different villages? It is argued that, over the last three decades or more, the three villages have acted in very different ways. There seems to be a degree of path dependence in terms of explaining this behaviour. Actions or decisions taken earlier as well as accidents of location, history and ecology have influenced to some degree in a determinate way the trajectory of change that these villages have followed. These distinct trajectories have had implications for the choices and options of the inhabitants of these villages and in part help explain the trajectories that households within the village have taken.

The three villages in this study can thus be characterised in distinctive ways. Village A has been characterised as a “developmental” village in the sense that it developed a social vision of its future very early on that has carried through to the present; this has had beneficial implications for the welfare of most of its households. Village B is described more as a “warrior” village which, by virtue of its relative economic strength, has adopted an aggressive stance toward the external world in defence of its interests but has been less successful in providing internal physical security. The welfare outcomes for its households are possibly not as good as for Village A. Village C has had a much more “defensive” engagement with its immediate surroundings. Not only is it the poorest of the three villages, but for varying reasons it has existed on the margins socially, economically and politically, and this has limited its capacity to shape its future. On the other hand, it appears to be relatively united internally.

Each of these villages can be characterised as a corporate entity or “republic” with internal structures of self-management, a recognisable identity, and varying degrees of autonomy with respect to external power holders. The villages are also variable in terms of what they deliver (for example, physical security from the outer world and within the village, and other public goods), the quality of that provision and the accountability of village leadership and power holders. The idea of village republics is developed below. The final section characterises and investigates the corporate nature of the study villages and its effects on households living in them.

## 4.2 The concept of village republics

The concept of village republics is drawn from the work of Robert Wade<sup>44</sup> on conditions for collective action in a group of villages in southern India. The collective action Wade was concerned with was the management of scarce grazing land and irrigation water. It included forms of cooperation and community organisation outside the purview of the state, related to the provision of public goods and the reduction of risk of crop loss and social conflict around resource scarcity.

Wade’s work drew from scholarship on the village as a key social institution and its capacity to play a role in providing collective goods. Scott and Hayami,<sup>45</sup> drawing respectively from rural Vietnam and Japan, stressed the degree of collective action and moral economy that functioned in Asian peasant villages and the ability of such villages to supply public goods and security for the benefits of their members. On the other hand,

<sup>44</sup> Robert Wade, *Village Republics*.

<sup>45</sup> J. C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976); Y. Hayami, “Economic Approach to Village Community and Institution,” *Journal of Rural Development* 3 (1980): 27-29.

Popkin, also drawing on fieldwork in Vietnam,<sup>46</sup> was in distinct opposition to Scott and deeply sceptical of the capacity of villages to undertake collective action and provide social welfare. He argued that what characterised villages more was individualised behaviour, which imposed limits to cooperative action.

Why do some villages appear capable of collective action while others do not? Wade argued that scarcity of pasture and water and the risk associated with the provision of these are considerable inducements to organise and a key explanatory variable to account for differences in village behaviour. He acknowledged, though, that other factors such as social structure, demographic composition, linkages between markets and the behaviour of the local state are also critical. Given the history and level of physical insecurity in Badakhshan, the extent to which villages have been able to provide physical security and other public goods for their members and the degree to which this reflects collective action is a matter of considerable interest. A key public good is that of physical security,<sup>47</sup> and what is striking from the case studies that follow is the evidence of the robustness of the ability of the study villages as social units, despite their divisions and conflicts, to provide this and (to a variable extent) other public goods.

### 4.3 Three village republics

What follows is an argument for the corporate nature of the three villages in the study. The evidence used is drawn from field observations, key informant interviews, village-level discussions, and household interviews. For each village a historical perspective is adopted, key events identified and the role of customary institutions investigated.

#### *Village A: The developmental village*

This village is located in Yamgan District, some three-hours-drive from Jurm by road at just under 2,000 metres above sea level. It is situated on a relatively narrow plain, at most 0.5 km wide, on the northern side of the Kokcha River. Although it has the largest land area of any of the villages in the study, historically it has had a grain deficit, and villagers have migrated seasonally to work in Kunduz and Takhar for food; its livestock economy has provided the balance of its needs. In contrast with Village B, it has moderate inequalities in land holdings (the largest landowner owns 20 *jeribs* [4 ha] of irrigated land, most own 5 *jeribs* or less). The majority of the inhabitants are Sunni, but there are also a few Ismaili households.

The village is also not far from the lapis lazuli mines in Kuran Wa Munjan District.

Before the mujahiddin war, the village was at the end of the road, and government officials regularly visited to supervise and manage the mines. They used to stop with the *arbab* (traditional village leader), who provided horses to take them to the mine and back. This regular contact with government officials not only gave the village external contacts but, as reported by various informants, opened the eyes of the *arbab* to the significance of education in relation to employment. This combination of contacts and awareness led the *arbab* to lobby for the construction of a school in the village, although other nearby villages were opposed or uninterested.<sup>48</sup> As a result, a school was constructed in the 1950s, and by 1978 some 90% of the graduates in the district came

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46 Samuel Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). Popkin undertook his research in a region of recent settlement in the Mekong Delta in contrast to Scott's sites in a long established and densely populated area.

47 R. Luckham, "Introduction: Transforming Security and Development in an Unequal World," *IDS Bulletin* 40, no. 2 (2009): 1-10.

48 Key informant interview, November 2008.



from this one village.<sup>49</sup> It also meant that by 1978 several cohorts of students from the village had graduated from university and were in government employment. Wider contacts made at university were to be of value later as *wasita*.

Beginning with the 1978 revolution and for the following decade, the village's distance from the closest government stronghold in Jurm meant that direct conflict with government forces was limited, although various bombing raids were carried out, causing death and destruction. The *arbab* of the time (son of the previous *arbab*) was taken away by government forces and never seen again. However, it was reported that the village selected a leader or commander to lead the village and handle external relations with the mujahiddin parties. There have been reports that he has carried out violence and intimidation. A controversial person, he has lived outside the village since 2001 and has been appointed as a *woliswal*. However, he was also a former school teacher who continued to support education, and several of the village's graduates returned and taught in the schools, paid out of a levy within the village. The commander appears also to have been skillful in negotiating with the various external mujahiddin parties, keeping good relations and protecting the interests of the village. As one informant noted, this even included "coming late to the conflict,"<sup>50</sup> thereby minimising village casualties. That said, the village was not without internal conflict between *Jamiat-i-Islami*, of which the commander was a member, and the *Hizb-i-Islami*, which was also present within the village. Several conflicts and deaths occurred as a result.

In the early 1990s, with the establishment of Rabbani's administration in Badakhshan, the village maintained its relative independence. Despite its connection to the *Jamiat-i-Islami*, the village also had connections with the key Massoud commander Najmuddin Wasiq, based on a personal connection built between one village graduate and Najmuddin at an agricultural college.<sup>51</sup> Accordingly, as Najmuddin rose to power and gained control over the lapis lazuli mines, a key resource in Badakhshan, the village was able to negotiate access to this mine for one month a year, a source of income that ensured the survival of households during the years of drought. Several of the households in the study (for example, A24 and A33) worked in the mines during this period. According to various sources,<sup>52</sup> the benefits of the mines were distributed throughout the village. During the mid-1990s, a school for girls was started with support from Norwegian Church Aid, despite the opposition of some of the mullahs in the village.

After 2001, the educated elite of the village appear to have played a key role in engaging the attention of NGOs, particularly the AKF. Since 2003 the village has been successful, with AKF support, in expanding its educational facilities, drawing on teachers within the village for both boys and girls, and the first generation of girls are about to graduate from grade 12. There was successful lobbying for road improvement, the provision of safe water, and the construction of a clinic; in addition, AKF was persuaded to contribute \$60,000 to the village NSP grant for the construction of a micro hydel scheme that has brought electricity. AKF has employed a significant number of villagers in its local office as well as in the various construction schemes.

Economically the village has struggled since the decline of the opium economy and since the loss of access to the mines under Zalmay Khan's brother's control. The opium economy brought benefits, but the crop was never cultivated on the same scale as in lower locations such as Village B. The village appears to have come late to opium cultivation, possible starting in 2003, and abandoned it early, encouraged by AKF. With

49 It was not officially a district until the 1990s.

50 Key informant interview, November 2008.

51 Key informant interview, November 2008.

52 Key informant interviews, November 2008.

the dry year of 2008 there was a movement of labour out of the village to Iran and of young men into the police and army. However, joining the army does not appear to have taken place at the same scale as in Village B; proportionately, more of the boys and girls in the study households in Village A are in school than in the study households in the other villages (see Table 3).

Of the three villages, Village A is the most socially conservative with respect to the ability of women to move about freely, although, with the establishment of a girls' school in the mid-1990s, women have more access to education than in the other two villages in the study. The effects of girls' education seem to be working their way through shifting social norms with respect both to marriage (see Section 6) and to the willingness of girls to undertake without question customary obligations such as housework.

Finally, comment needs to be made about the customary authorities that have been present in the village, namely the *arbab*, the whitebeards (or elders), the *ulama* (clergy), and the commander, and their interaction since 2001 with the CDC introduced by the NSP. Each has had a particular role and sphere of authority. It is clear from respondents' comments<sup>53</sup> that the *arbab* carried considerable authority and respect by virtue of his links with visiting government officials and his behaviour in relation to the village. It was reported that he did not originally have significant land holdings but that, because he owned horses and was able to provide transport services, he acquired land during his lifetime. He was reported to have abolished some of the traditional perquisites of his position<sup>54</sup> and worked in consultation with both elders and the *ulama*.

The elders have no formal position but earn informal legitimacy and authority by personal conduct, performance and reputation. They play an essentially consultative role in village leadership and, more crucially, in the resolution of disputes between households. Their role may have been less important during the conflict period, but they have been very much in evidence since 2001 in a consultative role with respect to the CDC. The commander's authority rose and fell between 1980 and 2000. While it was reported by several sources that he was selected by the village and that the elders had a hand in this, his military and security role did not always command the support of villagers in general or of his relatives.<sup>55</sup>

The *ulama* appear to have had a variable influence in the village. Primarily they existed to provide authority on matters related to Sharia (Islamic law) and disputes over its interpretation, for example with respect to inheritance. There appear to have been various schools of interpretation of Sharia, varying from the stricter *Hizb -i-Islami* position and to the more relaxed position of the Hanafi school. According to one informant—a *maulawi* (religious teacher) who trained for 14 years in Pakistan—many in the older generation are not well informed on Sharia and have given interpretations that are not consistent with its principles.<sup>56</sup> While some in the clergy resisted the idea of girls' education, the decision by other clergy members to send their girls to school in the 1990s paved the way for acceptance.

When AKF came to establish a CDC in 2003, they encountered some fairly deep conflicts within the village between competing sources of authority.<sup>57</sup> Although these were resolved sufficiently to allow the formal election of the first CDC, two points are clear:

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53 Household and key informant interviews, July 2009.

54 Household interview, A24.

55 Key informant interviews, November 2008.

56 Key informant interview, July 2009.

57 Interview with NGO staff member, July 2009.

first, that the committee of the first CDC was not well respected in the village,<sup>58</sup> and second, that it functioned subject to the advice of the customary authorities and not the reverse. In this sense it appears to have depended on the customary sources of authority to operate. The election of a second CDC appears to have commanded more support.

In summary, Village A, by virtue of an early move into education, was well networked with external sources of authority before and during the war. This enabled the village, to a degree, to exercise control over its fortunes and set its own path of development. In this it was helped by an educated elite who maintained a social commitment to the village during the two decades of conflict prior to 2001 and leveraged connections after 2001 to secure external funding to expand village public goods. This broader vision of the welfare of the village can best be summarised by the way in which the 2009 presidential campaign was handled. Although the village has good links with Zalmay Khan, Abdullah Abdullah's campaign came to the village first asking to set up an election office there. This request was declined after discussion in the CDC on the grounds that it might contribute to conflict after the election. Zalmay Khan's campaign was also denied on the same request. This indicates both the village's independence and its external-relations management skills.

### ***Village B: The warrior village***

This village is located within a complex of five large villages in a wide, well-irrigated valley. Although it has the least arable land of the three study villages (Table 1), it has a high proportion of irrigated land. It is located about a 45-minute drive from Jurm. In the past, it had a self-sufficient grain economy and extensive livestock holdings. It has also had deep land inequalities,<sup>59</sup> with a minority of households owning the majority of the land. Although there is limited land in the village, many of the landless sharecrop land in neighbouring villages. The relations between the large landowners of the village and the relatively landless village downstream have been described as essentially feudal.<sup>60</sup> It is the most favoured of the three villages with respect to land and water resources and access to markets, and it lies 500 metres lower in altitude than the other two villages.

Before the mujahiddin war this village, with its relatively rich agrarian economy, was slow to embrace education. Although a school was established in the valley in the 1960s, few graduates were reported to have moved on to university and government employment. There also appears to have been an influential conservative clerical presence in the valley, mainly of the Wahabi School. After the 1978 revolution, the valley appears to have quickly joined the opposition; it was a site of intense resistance to government, although initially with no clear leadership, given the competing political parties of the left and right. The membership of the (leftist) *Shitami* appears to have been active in the valley, but the main mujahiddin parties soon took command in the valley primarily the *Hizb-i-Islami* and *Jamiat-i-Islami*. The mujahiddin were responsible for the destruction of the school<sup>61</sup> and for the killing of teachers in the valley, thus bringing to a halt all education in the village until after 2001.

On various occasions, Soviet soldiers launched direct attacks on the valley, because of its proximity to Jurm and its location as a centre of armed opposition. But these attacks were unsuccessful, and scenes of death and destruction were reported. While there was

58 Key informant interviews, July 2008.

59 Various informants (November 2008) made reference to the last generation of landowners holding land assets of 100 *jeribs* or more; Household B75 owned nearly 100 *jeribs* before the head divided his land.

60 Interviews with key informants from a neighbouring downstream village who work primarily as sharecroppers within Village B, November 2008.

61 Key informant interviews, November 2008.

considerable armed conflict and destruction within the valley, the village's economy appears to have survived. After the Soviets' departure, several commanders came to power although they were appointed by Najmuddin Wasiq and subject to his influence, rather than selected through village mechanisms as in the case of Village A. The fact that the village and valley were so clearly within the orbit of Najmuddin Wasiq's authority (he was located 15 kilometres away in Baharak) meant that nothing like the factional fighting that appears to have taken place around Village C or the divisions of Village A appears to have happened in Village B. Nevertheless there are various accounts from informants of brutal behaviour by these commanders. The head of Household B69 reported the enforced marriage of his daughter during that time. Thus, while collective action was effective in defending the village against the outside world during the Soviet period, it is less clear that control of the exercise of power by commanders or power holders within the village was assured after that date, reflecting inequalities within the village.

During the drought of the late 1990s, the village was affected by a decline in its economy, although not to the same extent as the other two villages. With the rise of the opium economy in 2000, the village economy flourished, and many reported it as a time of extraordinary prosperity with the purchase of cars, televisions and other luxury goods.<sup>62</sup> After 2001 the major commanders left the valley and moved into power in Kabul and elsewhere. Nevertheless, when there was an attempt to bring an opium eradication team in during 2005, the village as a whole erupted in armed opposition, seizing the team's vehicles,<sup>63</sup> an action that would have been unlikely in the other two villages.

With the decline of opium production from 2006 onwards, driven in part by the decline in opium price, the village economy also suffered. For those with sufficient land resources it meant a return to the pre-war economy of self-sufficiency. For those without land, it meant a decline in demand for off-farm labour, leading to significant outmigration, often into employment in the army and police, using the *wasitas* of the former commanders in Kabul.

Historically, the five villages in the valley were reported to have come under the authority of one *arbab* from a village above Village B. However during the 1950s, Village B secured its own *arbab*. The head of Household B64 reported how his father, who had little land, had been on the verge of migrating because of poverty when he was asked, on account of his good reputation, to stay and become the *arbab*. However, the old customary structures appear to have been subsumed to the power of the village elite during the 1990s. The head of Household B69 (described in Section 6) gave an account of a commander using the elders to take his daughter by force. Further reports from informants did not indicate a current role as strong as found for these elders in Village A.

According to AKF, the village has been one of the more difficult locations for setting up NSP CDCs, due to opposition from those who had been in power prior to their establishment. The first CDC appears to have functioned well for a time, but disputes within it led to its resignation. Household interviews indicated little respect for the current CDC, which was reported by all informants to have been self-selected rather than elected.

In summary, the village, by virtue of its resources and position, has been able to provide physical security for its population with an aggressive stance in relation to the outer world, but it is far less evident that it has delivered physical security within the village, or the other public goods that are evident in Village A, or displayed the acumen of the leadership of Village A in dealing with external agencies. It does not seem to have any specific allegiances, and a distance from Zalmay Khan was evident in the comments of several of the informants. The village elite have remained largely self-interested.

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62 Interviews with several households including B69, B70 and B75.

63 Interview with Household B77.

### ***Village C: The defensive village***

This is the smallest of the three study villages, with 44 households, and is the most marginal of locations. Located up the narrow Khustak side valley from the Kokcha River, it is about a two-hours-drive from Jurm and about halfway from Jurm to Village A. It is reached by travelling up a further side valley on a recently constructed road funded by the NSP programme, which ascends steeply to the village, which is perched on a small plateau on the top of a hill. Before this road was constructed in 2007-08, the village was only reachable by a two-hour walk from the valley road. The irrigated lands of the village are located on terraced slopes surrounding the houses, but most of the crop area is rainfed.

Village C was founded by four or five Ismaili households who resettled from Balkh Province as a result of a two-century old conflict. The present households are mostly descendants of the original settlers and are closely related. It was originally a village of blacksmiths and traditional coat-makers, but demand for these skills declined with the appearance of cheap tools and clothes in the market. A significant portion of the village lands were reported<sup>64</sup> to have been sold a long time ago by their Shah (local Ismaili religious leader), but there are more certain recent records of land being sold during the drought years to the Khustaki people. (Twenty years ago, much of their pasture was taken by one of the Khustaki commanders in the main valley and distributed for rainfed cultivation to people from his village. They have apparently not attempted to recover this land, because of their marginal political status.

Before the war, villagers had limited access to education; there was a school in the valley, but only a few men from the village managed to graduate and attend university. The school was distant, and only the richer households could afford to spare male labour for education. Even before the war this village had a grain deficit, and there was substantial seasonal migration of labourers to Kunduz and Takhar provinces as well as to the Khustak and Jurm valleys. Relations with the valley people appear to have been pleasant, with cross marriages taking place between the two religious groups; some valley people report maternal<sup>65</sup> Ismaili descent and some village people report maternal Sunni parentage.

During the first phase of war (1978-92), the village had a perilous existence due to its religious minority status and was subject to considerable discrimination and hostility. While there were no reports of attacks or deaths, there are memories of physical violence against them<sup>66</sup> with labour and food being commandeered. But the village remained largely outside the conflict between the government and the mujahiddin.

After 1992, conflict within Khustak Valley and between Khustak Valley and villages in Jurm Valley escalated, with the villages at the mouth of the Khustak Valley being part of a shifting front line between forces aligned to Rabbani and those aligned to Massoud.

The position of the village appears to have become increasingly perilous until a village commander emerged who was better able to defend the village.<sup>67</sup> He achieved security in part by organisation and direct military action against a particularly predatory valley commander, but he also appears to have sought to align the village under the protection of a more sympathetic valley commander. Circumstances helped in that the hostile Commander Abbas was killed in a battle in Jurm and his replacement, Commander Qutbiddin, possibly because of his Ismaili parentage, was more protective of them. His

64 Key informant interviews, November 2008.

65 Given the general practice of patrilocal marriage (where a married couple lives with or near the husband's family), Ismaili girls would have married into Sunni households.

66 Interview with Household C45.

67 Interview with Household C57.

patronage of the village has secured their allegiance to him.

During the drought, the village lost livestock and mortgaged and sold land. About one-third of its irrigated lands are reported to be now owned by people from Madrassa and Khol in the Khustak Valley.<sup>68</sup> As a result, many households were in considerable debt by 2001 and even more dependent on sharecropping and wage labour. Only four of the 44 households reported having sufficient land to feed them for the whole year.

After 2001 the fractured and conflictual relations between Khustak Valley and Jurm continued,<sup>69</sup> and the village has maintained dependent relations with Qutbuddin, whose authority exceeds that of the village *shura* (village council) and is the point of dispute resolution for the village. The interests and benefits to Qutbuddin in providing patronage to the village are not clear but may relate to the fact that Khustak Valley is politically marginal in relation to Jurm. Relations between Qutbuddin and Jurm have been uneasy since the 1990s, although he has aligned himself with Zalmay Khan and campaigned with his team for Karzai in the recent presidential election. But Jurm has lost authority and territory over the last 30 years with the creation of the separate districts of Khosh, Warduj, Baharak and Yamgan out of the old Jurm district. Khustak failed to achieve its district independence, a source of some resentment<sup>70</sup> given the opposition of Jurm to its separation, and this has kept the Khustak Valley politically dependent on Jurm. The marginal political position of Khustak and the subservient position of Village C to Khustak gave the village little room for independent manoeuvre.

Village C also experienced relative prosperity during the years of opium cultivation, but not to the same extent as Villages A and B, given its limited lands. Undoubtedly both the amount of work and the wage rates in the main Jurm Valley benefited many of those dependent on labour for income. The village came late to opium cultivation in 2004 and therefore missed the peak price years of 2002-03. It seems to have cultivated the crop for only two years, ceasing as a result of a *ferman* (religious instruction) from the Aga Khan. Since then the economy of the village has declined; with its dependence on rainfed lands, it suffered particularly during a very dry 2008. Several households had to sell significant livestock to survive. As a consequence, there has been migration to Iran, but there has been little recruitment into the army and police. The death of the son of one of the interviewed households in the army two years ago was widely commented on as a reason not to join the army.

More children are now attending school, but the need for household labour for food security is a restricting factor. For girls, the distance to the school in the valley prevents most from continuing beyond grade 8, because it is deemed too risky for girls at this stage to be visible in public. However, of the three villages, this appears to be the one where women have the greatest internal freedom to move, helped perhaps by the smallness of the village and the degree of relatedness between the households. Although the road has now given better access to the school and the clinic, there is no safe water source, and the lack of access to drinking water is a particular problem in the summer. The burden of women's work in this village (particularly in relation to water collection) was cited in one case<sup>71</sup> as the reason why girls from other local Ismaili villages would not marry into Village C.

The NSP established a CDC, but it is widely viewed as dysfunctional, as it is unable to draw in development resources or play any role in dispute resolution. For the latter,

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68 Pain, "The Impact of the Opium Poppy Economy."

69 Even recently, the head of the CDC (Household C57) reported having to negotiate with Khustak landlords to allow members of Village C to work on the NSP-funded road without fear of repercussions.

70 Key informant interviews, November 2008.

71 Interview with Household C45.

villagers seem to rely on Qutbuddin, and there were frequent references to his authority and capacity in this respect. Customary institutions and sources of authority were difficult to find in this village. In part, this may be a function of the village's small size, inter-relatedness and dependence on external authorities. As an Ishmaili village it would have traditionally come under the authority of their Shah. While there were individuals who had earned respect and achieved authority, a village leader or group of elders was not clearly visible.

The village suffers from a lack of independent connections to the wider world. One graduate from the village is now working with AKF in Jurm, although he has been engaged in the village and was instrumental in supporting them in renovating the village's water-powered flour mill in 2008. A few others have achieved positions outside Badakhshan. One is a district security chief in a neighbouring province, but the view on him was universal: "I do not know how he got his position, and he has done nothing for this village."<sup>72</sup>

In summary, Village C has always been on the margins politically and economically. Its minority status and small size made it dependent on a local valley commander for protection, but its ability to make wider strategic alliances has been limited given its location within a wider valley context, which in turn is politically dependent on outside power. Village C's survival has depended on maintaining a defensive strategy of risk avoidance; it has been a follower rather than a leader. It has had limited resources or capacity, beyond achieving security through protectorate status, to act independently to generate a wider portfolio of public and social goods.

#### 4.4 Accounting for differences

The differences between the three study villages are significant, but the key public good that they have all maintained, to varying degrees and through contrasting means, is physical security. This has affected the provision of other public or social goods. In the case of Village A, both an early investment in education and the building of external networks and their strategic use helped build a capacity for physical security. While in part this physical security had to be provided through a credible independent force, a key part of gaining security, helped by relative remoteness, was also the external strategic alliances that sheltered the village from the worst aspects of conflict. After 2001, the social action evident of the village leadership has been leveraged into a capacity to generate further social goods through successful capture of NGO interest and external resources.

For Village B there is little evidence of engagement with the wider world prior to 1978, possibly due to its relatively secure agrarian economy. Helped by its defensive location, its response after 1978 was to organise military power that, through force, successfully provided security against the outer world. After the departure of the Soviets, self-interest of the village power holders appears to have become more evident, reflecting perhaps the greater wealth inequalities of this village compared with the other two. As a consequence, physical security within the village has not been assured. There does not appear to have been the degree of social concern for the village by its leadership that is evidenced in Village A, and there has been limited action to secure other public goods since 2001. The village prospered in the opium years. In contrast, Village C, small and economically and socially marginal, has gained physical security by achieving protectorate status and creating local strategic alliances, but the provision of public goods has been limited.

The fact is that all three villages have survived, although they have done so through

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Household C43.

different means and with varying outcomes. Although they all have show to varying degrees a persistence of customary institutions, both hierarchical (village elite) and consensual (for example, the role of elders in dispute resolution and the earning of position by reputation). The greatest evidence of action for the village good and its consequences is to be found with respect to the educational outcomes, which are best among household respondents in Village A (Table 3).

**Table 3. Literacy rates and school attendance by age and sex for the respondent households**

	Village A	Village B	Village C
Literate male head	4	1	2
Literate female head	0	0	0
Males 18 and older: total number	19	24	25
Males 18 and older: percent literate	47%	17%	24%
Females 18 and older: total number	16	23	15
Females 18 and older: percent literate	12.5%	8.7%	7%
Males 5-17: total number	17	14	11
Males 5-17: percent at school	94%	71%	100%
Females 5-17: total number	13	11	9
Female 5-17: percent at school	100%	73%	78%

The data in Table 3, drawn from the respondent households, shows that the proportion of men 18 and older that are literate in Village A is nearly twice that of the other two villages. Further, although the discrepancy between female and male literacy rates is significant and the literacy rates for women 18 and older are low, there are more older literate women in the study households in village A than in those in the other two villages. All the girls between age 5 and 17 in Village A study households are attending school, compared with about 75% in the other two villages' households. For all but one of the indicators of literacy levels (percent of women older than 18 who are literate), Village B respondents score lower than those in the other two villages. In summary, the effects of long-term education are evident in village A. Although this has led to employment within the village of educated people by an NGO, this is unlikely to be replicable across many villages. However, the social action of the village leadership in Village A has, through infrastructure projects, created significant opportunities for non-farm wage labour that have been limited in the other two villages.

To what extent can the actions of the different villages be seen as evidence of collective action? The evidence is strongest for Village A, where the role and accountability of customary institutions give the impression of at least some concern for the village good. In contrast, it would be difficult to argue in the case of Village B that anything other than village elite behaviour and interests have driven this warrior village republic. In Village C, smallness and the inter-relatedness of households combined with religious and physical marginality have probably reinforced collective interests, but in this case security has been achieved through dependent relations with external power holders. But as discussed in the following sections, economic insecurity, the high degree of inter-relatedness through marriage and the precariousness of the prosperity of even the richest households may well have contributed to a degree of cooperative action and the "moral economy" that Scott<sup>73</sup> argues for in all the villages. To explore this, there is a need to investigate household economic trajectories.

73 Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*.



## 5. Household Economic Trajectories

### 5.1 Introduction

This section investigates the economic fortunes of the sample households from 2002-3 to 2008-9, taking the household as an analytical unit. (The inner workings of the household are examined in Section 6.) First, each village and the sample households within it are considered, making comparisons between wealth groups and between households within wealth groups and investigating some of the variables that might account for the households' different fortunes. For each village, tables summarise household differences, similarities and trajectories. Second, the villages are compared, drawing on the village contrasts outlined in Section 4, and differences between households in similar wealth groups are considered, although it should be remembered that the wealth group classifications are relative to each village and not directly comparable across villages. This leads into a discussion of underlying causes or drivers of change and the contrasts between structural dimensions and household-specific factors.

### 5.2 Household trajectories by village

#### *Village A (developmental)*

Table 4 summarises, by household and by wealth group, key household features and changes in household composition over the last five years. In five households the husband had a first wife who has died. As the sixth column shows, two households (A24 and A34) are joint households and have taken in new members (three marriages in total with new daughters-in-law moving in). Two joint households have divided (A22 and A23), with sons moving out with their wives and children.

**Table 4. Village A: Household characteristics**

Wealth group	Household	Household head age	Number of wives (died)	Household head literate?	Number of married couples	Number of household members	Change since 2003			
							- D	- O	+ B	+ M
I	A38	46	1(1)	Yes	1	12	0	1	4	0
	A23	70	1(1)	No	1	8	0	2	0	0
II	A24	60	1	Yes	2	11	0	0	1	1
	A34	60	1	Yes	3	18	0	0	3	2
III	A22	55	1	No	1	5	1	2	0	0
	A27	75	1(1)	No	1	4	0	0	0	0
	A33	45	1(1)	No	1	8	1	0	2	0
	A36	55	1(1)	Yes	1	11	0	0	1	0

D = death; O = member has married or moved out; B = birth; M = member has married in

The number of household members ranges from 4 to 18 with a median of 8. Two households in wealth group III are smaller than the median size, and three households in wealth groups I and II are larger than the median. Households in wealth groups I and II have had in total eight births and no deaths since 2003; households in wealth group III have had two deaths and three births. Attention needs to be paid to the composition of the household with respect to the ratio of dependents (those who are unlikely to make a major economic contribution to the household from their labour) and those who are potentially economically active (males 16 and older; see Table 5). The ratio of males 16 and older to household size varies from 0.125 (Household A33, which also has the youngest head of household) to over 0.37 (Household A23). However, this ratio needs qualification with respect to the age and health of the head of household and the capacities (particularly health) of male labour in the household. Thus for Household A27

there is little effective male labour because the head of the household is old and sick and the adult son is disabled.

**Table 5. Village A: Household assets**

Wealth group	Household	Male labour, 16 and older	Irrigated land (jeribs)	Rainfed land (jeribs)	Garden (no. of trees)	Change in garden since 2003 (no. of trees)	Livestock (cow/other)*	Change in livestock since 2003 (cow/other)
I	A38	2	15.0	5.0	>20	0	3/0	n.d.
II	A23	3	3.0	3.0	120	0	2/0	0/-40
	A24	3	1.0	0.5	110	0	1/0	n.d.
	A34	4	3.0	8.0	70	+2	6/23	n.d./-10
III	A22	2	0.0	0.0	100-150	0	2/2	0/-3
	A27	(2)	2.0	1.0 (?)		G sold	2/1	-2/-1
	A33	1	0.0	0.0	1	-1	1/2	-1/-2
	A36	3	1.0	3.0	0	0	1/6	n.d.

\* Other = goat or sheep; n.d. = no data available. ? = value not clear

Table 5 details household land and livestock assets. The contrasts between the limited land holdings of households in wealth group III (two have no arable land) and those of households in wealth groups I and II should be noted, although one household in wealth group II (A24) has little land or livestock. The role of gardens for fruit, fuel and timber as a source of income should be noted; again, with the exception of one household in wealth group III (A22), it is the wealth group I and II households that hold these assets. Livestock holdings are small and are reported to have declined over the last five years.

What does this mean for the household food economy? The third column of Table 6 provides a snapshot, based on estimates of current monthly wheat consumption, of the household annual requirement for wheat. The fourth column provides an estimate of what can be produced from land owned or sharecropped in an average year. (With one exception, Household A23, none of the households reported sharecropping.) Households were asked to assess how often in the last ten years they had had good, average and bad years with respect to production. They reported consistently that good years had happened two to three times, average years about three times and bad years about four to five times over a ten-year period; so in at least half the years, food provision from a household's own production was less than indicated in the table. Given that rainfed lands are susceptible to crop failure in drier years and that these comprise nearly 45% of the arable land for the sample households, the precariousness of crop production reliability should not be underestimated. The year 2008 was particularly dry.

**Table 6. Village A: Household food economy**

Wealth group	Household	Grain requirement (sers/year)*	Grain production (sers/year)*	Number of months/year supplied from production	Other sources of income		
I	A38	360	240	8	Salary		
II	A23	200	60	4	Wood	Livestock	Wages
	A24	360	30	1	Salary	Wages	
	A34	540	180	4	Salary	Wages	Livestock
III	A22	120	0	0	Wood	Wages	Charity
	A27	60	30	6	Wages	Charity	Craft
	A33	200	0	0	Wages	Charity	WFP†
	A36	300	100	4	Wages	WFP	Livestock

\* Estimated. One ser is about 7 kg. † WFP = World Food Programme

Only two households meet 50% or more of their grain requirements by on-farm production. One (A38) is relatively land rich. The other (A27) is the smallest household, with four

people; it sold its garden within the last five years in order to feed itself. How have other households met the shortfall? In three households in wealth groups I and II, the households with literate heads, one or more male members have salaried employment either with the AKF or in schools. Three of the households also have males who can undertake casual wage labour in the village and surrounding district. Household A23 has a large garden; it has been able to secure its grain supplies through the sale of livestock reserves and wage labour. This is a household in long-term decline with an ageing head, and household division has deprived it of its one secure income source, a salaried teacher (see below).

For the wealth group III households, wage labour is the most important source of income, but this is highly seasonal, limited in amount and variable, with poor rainfall years generating less farm employment. Various estimates indicated that at best three months of non-farm wage labour might be available, although the construction of roads, the mini-hydroelectrical plant and schools within the village have provided a small but important source of casual labour opportunities. Wealth group III households reported two other sources of grain: charity from richer households, which poor households saw as an entitlement, providing one to two months of grain, and the grain provided by the World Food Programme for girls going to school. Table 7 provides an assessment of the overall direction of each household trajectories and the likely causes or factors contributing to that trajectory.

**Table 7. Village A: Household trajectories**

Wealth group	Household	Overall	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Other issues
I	A38	Maintaining	Salary	Land to sell		Son at college
II	A23	Declining	War	Household division	Age	Son at college
	A24	Prospering	Salary	Wages		
	A34	Prospering	Salary	Wages		Male labour
III	A22	Declining	Loss of wages	Household separation	Illness	
	A27	Declining	Age	Death of son	No labour	
	A33	Declining	Health	Death	Land sale	1 son, 4 daughters
	A36	Declining	Household size, composition	Limited land		5 sons, 1 daughter, all at school

How then might one characterise the overall economic trajectory of the sample households? The head of Household A38 is a formerly large landowner who had more than 100 sheep two decades ago. He had sufficient agricultural resources and wealth to go on *haj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) ten years ago, but his agricultural resources are in decline. The death of his first wife, leaving him with young children, led him to marry his first wife's younger niece, leading to more children. His education has gained him salaried employment in an NGO educational programme. He sees no future in agriculture and is likely to sell off more land to pay off some considerable debts from illnesses (73,000 Af). Despite his assets and salary, the demands of his large household are considerable, and he is just able to meet them without affecting his overall standard of living.

In the case of the two households that are prospering, A24 and A34, the causes of this prosperity are somewhat different. For Household A24, the previous generation had land that it sold, the husband worked in the lapis lazuli mines in 1990 and earned enough to raise a herd of 200 goats and sheep, although this was subsequently lost. With limited land resources, and less work in the lapis mines (he is now a shopkeeper with an irregular income), the household went into decline after 2001 and did not prosper during the opium years due to lack of land and household labour and the husband working away

from home. However, the son, although not literate, gained experience as a driver in Faizabad, returned to the village and secured employment, possibly through connections, as a driver with AKF in 2007. Salaried employment has given access to credit and financed the son's marriage. (This household had the largest reported debts of all households, estimated at 85,000 Afs, of which 75,000 Afs are due to marriage costs). Household A34 is a large joint household, but the fact that two members have salaried employment with AKF accounts for its good fortunes, although it is also labour rich. The combination of land, salaried employment, available male labour and lack of debt probably puts it on a more secure footing than Household A24. The head of Household A34 pointed to the unity within his household as a source of its security.

The case of Household A23, which is in long-term decline, is complex. A series of events have contributed to its fall in economic fortunes. During the war, as a wealthy household, it fulfilled an important role in providing food and hospitality to the mujahiddin. This initiated a decline in livestock resources. Although the head of household owned a shop during this time, he overextended the provision of credit during the drought, which led him into debt. He separated from his brothers and appears to have made some misjudgements while trading in opium, leading him into opium-denominated debt that forced further livestock sales. When his son, an educated man and a teacher, came of age, the household was economically secure for a time, but due to internal conflict after the son's marriage, his son left, taking his income with him. The head of the household, now aged, has sufficient land-based assets to hold the household together but few immediate prospects, although a son currently in college may provide some security for the future.

All four wealth group III households' economic fortunes have declined since 2002-3 for different reasons. In Household A22, the head's loss of his position as keeper of the key at the village shrine deprived the household of its main source of income. Added to this was a division of the household with brothers moving out, a death due to long-term sickness, costs associated with the sickness and a lack of labour. Although the head undertakes some wage labour, the sale of wood is the major source of income. For Household A27, the smallest of the households, both males who could provide income through labour, as noted above, are sick and have limited work capacity. This leaves one daughter who is attending school. The cause of the household's decline can be traced to an injury over six years ago that severely limited the work the household head can do. This led to the sale of a garden to feed the household and pay for the funeral of a sister. The small income comes from the wife, who weaves baskets and exchanges them for wheat. Household A33 is a similar case of decline due to illness, this time from working in the lapis mines over a 20-year period. While the head of this household was employed, he built up a livestock herd, but over the last five years these have been sold off and land has been mortgaged. The household has five children. Despite the economic hardship, all three school-age children, including the two daughters, are at school, in part for the World Food Programme food that their attendance brings.

Household A36 is suffering because of household size and consumption demand in relation to income, although the household head has an elder brother who lives with him and helps. The head is economically active but dependent on wage labour. All six of his children, ages 8 to 17, are at school; the eldest son is beginning to earn some part-time income as a vaccinator. All wealth group III households have food debts ranging from 4,000 to 6,000 Afs.

Although the immediate reasons for economic decline of the wealth group III households are all household-specific (illness, death, household size, lack of household labour) with differing implications for long-term household well-being, these have to be seen within the context of the changing dynamics of the village and district agrarian economy. For all

households, the years of relative prosperity were the opium cultivation years, when wage rates were higher, employment opportunities greater and food security more assured. Since the decline of the opium economy all have reported a decline in consumption, both in quality and quantity; many were badly hit by the rise in grain prices in 2008. Although 2009 has seen a fall in grain prices and more on-farm employment through a better irrigated and rainfed wheat crop, this is not a village with a future as an agricultural economy. The three households that have either maintained or improved their economic status have done so through salaried employment, secured in two cases through education. The remarkable feature of households in this village has been the capacity and desire of even the poorer households to keep children at school: All girls between the age of 5 and 17, and 94% of boys, are at school (see Table 3).

### **Village B (warrior)**

Table 8 summarises the main features of the Village B sample households. In two households the head has married more than once, and there is one case of divorce. All four of the households in wealth groups I and II are joint households. Household B75 had a large household when he had two wives, but six of his sons have now separated. Three of the households in wealth groups I and II are larger than the median size for the sample, and three of the wealth group III households are smaller than the median. With the exception of B75, the wealth group I and II households have increased in size. Wealth group III households have either stayed the same or become smaller.

**Table 8. Village B: Household characteristics**

Wealth group	Household	Household head age	Number of wives [divorced] (died)	Household head literate?	Number of married couples	Number of household members	Change since 2003			
							- D	- O	+ B	+ M
I	B70	68	1	No	4	19	0	0	6	0
	B69	60	1	No	2	11	0	0	2	1
II	B64	70	1	Yes	3	16	0	1	4	0
	B75	71	1[1](1)	No	2	5	0	12	0	0
III	B77	50	1	Yes	1	9	0	1	0	1
	B66	46	1	Yes	1	11	1	1	2	0
	B65	85	1(1)	No	1	4	0	1	0	0
	B74	62	1	No	1	5	0	1	0	0

D = death; O = member has married or moved out; B = birth; M = member has married in

The data in Table 9 indicate the key differences in assets between the three wealth groups. The wealth group I households (B70 and B69) are both relatively land poor but labour rich as joint households, and their ability to sharecrop additional land is the reported basis of their wealth. One has bought rainfed land, and both have increased their livestock numbers but did not say by how much. The wealth group II households (B64 and B75) are land rich but labour poor relative to the resources they have. Household B64 has two sons and four daughters (and seven grandchildren under the age of 13). The household also has the largest livestock herd (100 goats and sheep), and the availability of labour was reported as being crucial to building up of livestock herds and taking them to the summer pastures (*ailaq*). This was seen to be a task for women, and so a joint household was the only way in which larger livestock holdings could be managed. The head of Household B75 had more than 100 *jeribs* of irrigated land before he divided his property between his six sons, and he now farms out his remaining land to sharecroppers due to lack of labour.

**Table 9. Village B: Household assets**

Wealth group	Household	Male labour, 16 and older	Irrigated land ( <i>jeribs</i> )	Rainfed land ( <i>jeribs</i> )	Garden (no. of trees)	Change in garden since 2003 (no. of trees)	Livestock (cow/other)*	Change in livestock since 2003 (cow/other)*
I	B70	6	0.5	4.0	(100)	+4_rfd	4/30	+
	B69	5	2.0	2.0	500	0	4/35	+
II	B64	3	10.0	10.0	0	0	7/100	+
	B75	2	20.0	0.0	0	Division	6/20	+
III	B77	2	2.0	0.0	0	0	1	n.d.
	B66	1	0.0	0.0	0	0	1	n.d.
	B65	1	0.0	0.0	60	0	1	n.d.
	B74	1	0.0	0.0	0	0	3	n.d.

\* Other = goat or sheep; n.d. = no data available

Only one of the four households in wealth group III has any land (2 *jeribs*), supporting a picture of considerable landownership inequalities in this village. Wealth group III households also have few livestock and limited male labour. The means by which these contrasting households secure their grain supplies reflects their resources (Table 10). Wealth group I households meet much of their annual grain requirements by sharecropping land secured with household labour and through the sale of livestock. Wealth group II households have more land and can meet most of their grain requirements through production on their own farms, making up the shortfall through livestock sales.

Wealth group III households meet their grain needs through diverse activities. The heads of the most secure households (B77 and B66) are both literate; one works as a school caretaker and the other is a mullah who also sharecrops and works at wage labour. Both are relatively young and economically active, but their households are large (9 and 11 members, respectively); Household B66 lacks male labour. The other two wealth group III households have older household heads and few resources; B65 was formerly a wealthy household whose fortunes declined through a sequence of mishaps. Household B74 has always been poor and has only daughters, one of whom is married. The household head's marriage to a woman whose behaviour was not approved of by the village has led the household to migrate to Baharak (discussed in Section 6).

**Table 10. Village B: Household food economy**

Wealth group	Household	Grain requirement ( <i>ser</i> s/yr)*	Grain production ( <i>ser</i> s/yr)*	Number of months/year supplied from production	Other sources of income		
I	B70	500	420	10	Sharecropping	Livestock	
	B69	420	350	10	Sharecropping	Livestock	
II	B64	600	600	12	Livestock		
	B75	180	120	8	Land <sup>†</sup>	Livestock	
III	B77	240	120	6	Salary	Sharecropping	
	B66	300	120	5	Sharecropping	Wages	Role as mullah
	B65	100	0	0	Shopkeeping	Trees	
	B74	180	0	0	Wages		

\* Estimated. One *ser* is about 7 kg.; <sup>†</sup> farming out land to sharecroppers

The household trajectories are consistent with the household economies discussed above. Both wealth group I households are either prospering or maintaining their position (Table 11). Both benefited enormously because of their labour resources from the years of the opium economy. Household B70 has no debts, while Household B69 has 32,000 Af\$ in debts (20,000 Af\$ from a marriage). The account given by the head of Household B69 of how he built up the household economy by strategic use of resources over time is both

exceptional and a reflection of a certain degree of luck in timing:

I got 200 *sers* of wheat and barley that year (about 30 years ago), when our economy was very weak, and once I went to mosque and appealed to people to accept me as a shepherd so that I could earn my livelihood and was accepted. There was another person who worked together with me as a shepherd, and he also got 200 *sers* of wheat and barley. I did reaping work for three years after that, when I used to contract with landowners to reap their wheat on 3 or 4 *jeribs* of land for the wage of 100-150 *sers* of wheat. We (two or three people) used to reap, and each of us got 2-3 *sers* of wheat per day. That wheat fed my family for one year, because my children were small and our expenditure was not much. After three years reaping I went to Iran, because my children were small. I did not have oxen to plough land, so I could not get land for sharecropping. My aim in going to Iran was to get money so that I could buy oxen to be able to sharecrop land. I was in Iran for 9 months...and saved 180,000 Afs. I had sent 100,000 Afs to my family with people who were returning from Iran, and brought the rest, 80,000 Afs, with me. We bought necessities with some of this amount and bought two oxen with the rest. It was the start of my sharecropping, when I sharecropped 3 *jeribs* of irrigated land from Haji H., on which I cultivated poppy. During this sharecropping period I used to work in his flour mill and earned our livelihood. I married my off first son with the money I had earned from sharecropping and working in the flour mill, and sold some rainfed land as well.

The head of Household B70 has also had a slow rise to prosperity, although in his case it is more the coming of age of his five sons that has been a key factor: As he commented, “Five to ten years ago I was sharecropping on 5 *jeribs* of land, but in the last two years I am sharecropping on 25 *jeribs* of land, because before my sons were too young and were not able to help me in farming.”

**Table 11. Village B: Household trajectories**

Wealth group	Household	Overall	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Other issues
I	B70	Prospering	Labour rich	Buying land		Prospered in opium economy
	B69	Maintaining	Labour rich	Used opium strategically	Earlier migration	Prospered but now struggling
II	B64	Struggling	Household size and composition	No non-farm income		
	B75	Declining	Age	Household division	Sickness	Previously wealthy but two educated sons may ensure security
III	B77	Maintaining	Salary	Household size		Prospered in opium economy
	B66	Struggling	Household size			Sons at school
	B65	Declining	Health	Household division		Previously wealthy, sons separated
	B74	Declining	War	Migration		

Both households in wealth group II are in decline. They have substantial assets to buffer their economy, but these resources have shrunk considerably over the last decade. Increasing age, limited labour in relation to household assets and the lack of non-farm income are reasons for their decline. The father of the head of Household B64 was an *arbob* who rose from poverty; but subsequent land divisions and a large household with only two sons have constrained his economic activities: “I have daughters and

fewer men to work; this lack of labour has a negative effect on my household.” He has food debts of 8,000 Afs, while the head of Household B75 has debts of 29,000 Afs incurred through illness (9,000 Afs) and the marriage of one of his sons (20,000 Afs). The decline of Household B75 relative to its prosperous past, when it held over 100 *jeribs*, is attributable to the head of household’s age and the separation from the household of his six sons.

In Households B77 and B66, the energy of the household heads is holding the economy together, but barely. The head of Household B77 made considerable income during the opium years through trading; his salary as a school storekeeper helps him to survive, and one of his sons is in the army. However, there are five children age 16 or less, and he is effectively the only labour source in the household. The same is true for household B66: The two elder children are daughters, and there are seven children age 15 and under, so the household is deeply constrained for labour. Neither household inherited much land; when the head of Household B77 lived with his brothers, the economy was better, but conflict led to separation. The brothers sold their shares of land to marry, but he managed to hold onto his and prospered through opium trading. The head of Household B66 inherited only a house, although his grandfather had 20 *jeribs* of land, and has maintained the household economy through hard labour.

Household B65 was formerly a prosperous household; it had more than 120 sheep in the 1990s, but they were lost during the war years. The household rebuilt its wealth through opium trading, but subsequently the sons separated, leading to a decline in household income; the head is now an old man and runs a small shop which just provides for the needs of the small household. Household B74 is small and made up mostly of daughters, and as the head has aged, his employment opportunities in the village have declined. A conflict in the village led the household to migrate to Baharak, where the wife originally came from and where the household ekes out a living based on his casual labour and the earnings of his wife.

Thus, in contrast to Village A, those households in Village B that have resources of land, livestock or labour are able to meet household food requirements through agriculture, although with household divisions the availability of land for sharecropping is in long-term decline. All the households in wealth groups I and II basically have these resources, or have had them in the recent past, and have also maintained joint households. But as Household B75 shows, as a household ages and division takes place, a decline in the household economy can result. Two of the land-poor households in wealth group III, with their relatively young household heads, have been able to sharecrop land and meet a significant part of their household needs through production, farm labour and other sources of income. However, the other two wealth group III households, with no land, have had to secure their needs from off or non-farm sources<sup>74</sup>. As a whole, the village prospered greatly when opium was grown. The decline of the opium economy has particularly affected the poorer households.

### ***Village C (defensive)***

Three of the household heads in Village C are single; one of those (C45) is a widower. The head of Household C56 is a teacher and remains unmarried for the present by choice, although he plans to marry in the future. (His older married brother is also in the household, so the head is not the oldest male.) The head of Household C46 could not afford to marry and lives with the widow of his deceased brother. As will be discussed in Section 6, while it is the custom for a widow to marry her brother-in-law on the death of

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<sup>74</sup> Off-farm work involves working on other people’s land; non-farm income is income from non-agricultural sources e.g., urban labour.



her husband, in this case the widow decided not to remarry. This links to a second point: the struggle that men have to marry in this village, leading in some cases to matrilineal marriage (marrying into the wife's household). This issue is explored further in Section 6 along with the effects of economic hardship on delaying marriage, also found in the other two villages.

Table 12 summarises the main features of the sample households in Village C.

**Table 12. Village C: Household characteristics**

Wealth group	Household	Household head age	Number of wives (died)	Household head literate?	Number of married couples	Number of household members	Change since 2003			
							- D	- O	+ B	+ M
I	C57	40	1	Yes	2	20	2	0	6	0
	C58	65	1	No	2	7	9	0	0	0
II	C43	30	1	No	1	5	1	0	2	1
	C49	58	1	No	1	10	1	0	0	0
	C56	31	0	Yes	1	11	3	0	3	0
III	C45	70	(1)	No	1	11	0	0	0	0
	C46	57	0	No	0	3	0	1	0	0
	C52	65	1	No	1	7	0	1	0	0

D = death; O = member has married or moved out; B = birth; M = member has married in

In Village C, 16 deaths were reported since 2003, compared to 1 and 2 in villages A and B, respectively. Nine of these occurred in one household; the effects of this are discussed below in looking at household trajectories. Only two of the households have a literate male head, and there are four joint households (in addition to C57 and C58, C56 and C45 are joint households with an unmarried man and a widower living respectively with a married brother and married son): both of the wealth group I households and one in each of the other two wealth groups. Wealth group I and II households and wealth group III households have an equal number of households above and below the median size. Possibly related to the number of unmarried men, male labour ratios for households are slightly higher among respondents in this village, ranging from 0.18 to 0.42 with four households having values greater than 0.3 (in contrast to respondents in Village A, with only two, and Village B, with three). Two of the households have heads younger than 40.

As shown in Table 13, in contrast with the households in Village B, there are no major differences in landownership between the households, and the range of area owned is much narrower (0-4 *jeribs* of irrigated land, compared with 0-20 *jeribs* in Village B). No land has been sold, and only one household is without land.

**Table 13. Village C: Household assets**

Wealth group	Household	Male labour, 16 and older	Irrigated land (jeribs)	Rainfed land (jeribs)	Garden (No. of trees)	Change	Livestock (cow/other)*	Change in livestock no since 2003
								Cow/other
I	C57	4	4.0	5.0	0	0	1/60	-3/-70
	C58	2	4.0	1.0	100	0	2/40	-0/-100
II	C43	1	1.0	1.0	0	0	0/10	-2/-8
	C49	3	0.5	0.5	6	0	2/20	n.d.
	C56	2	4.0	3.0	0	0	1/19	-2/-15
III	C45	4	0.5	1.0	0	0	0/8	0/0
	C46	1	1.5		50	0	1/10	-2/0
	C52	3	0.0	0.0	0	0	1/20	-0/-80

\* Other = goat or sheep; n.d. = no data available

In contrast to Village B study households, all households own livestock; most have experienced a sharp decline in their holdings over the last five years. This is particularly true of Households C57, C58 and C52, which have seen a 50% decline, primarily due to sales. Only in Household C49 have livestock numbers increased; but as with all households, it reported that most livestock did not give birth in 2009 due to poor pasture conditions in 2008. The head of this household expects to have to sell livestock to pay for his son's marriage.

**Table 14. Village C: Household food economy**

Wealth group	Household	Grain requirement (sers/year)*	Grain production (sers/year)*	Number of months/year supplied from production	Other sources of income		
I	C57	720	360	6	Shopkeeping	Livestock	
	C58	260	300	10	Livestock	Sharecropping	
II	C43	180	105	7	Livestock	Loan	
	C49	240	80	4	Livestock	Shopkeeping	
	C56	450	225	6	Salary	Livestock	
III	C45	240	100	5	Wages	Sharecropping	Livestock
	C46	180	90	6	Shepherding	Loan	
	C52	360	180	6	Wages	Loan	Livestock

\* Estimated. One ser is about 7 kg.

It is clear, given the small landholdings, effects of drought and grain price rises, why livestock stocks have declined. Few households secure more than 50%, even in a good year, of their grain requirements from their own land, and the sale of livestock is a common means by which the shortfall is covered, particularly for the wealthier households. All households have food debts, mostly interest-bearing, with valley shopkeepers. Only two households have non-farm sources of income, a shop for Household C58 and a teaching position for Household C56. The consequence is that the households in this village (Table 15) are either struggling to maintain themselves (three households) or in decline with a loss of assets and increasing debt (five households).

**Table 15. Village C: Household trajectories**

Wealth group	Household	Overall	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Other Issues
I	C57	Declining	Household size	Livestock decline		
	C58	Declining	Death	Livestock decline		
II	C43	Declining	Death	Livestock decline	Living on credit	Debts
	C49	Struggling	Debts	Death	Livestock increase	
	C56	Struggling	Deaths	Salary	Sale of livestock	Long-term prospects good
III	C45	Struggling	Labour			Labour rich
	C46	Declining	Unmarried	Age	Loss of livestock	Very small household
	C52	Declining	Unmarried	Sick father	Declining livestock	

Both of the wealth group I households have been in economic decline, but the reasons are different. In the case of Household C57, the largest household and a joint one, the consumption demand of a large household is part of the struggle; but as head of the village, there is also a need to provide hospitality to guests. One son works as the household shepherd, and an 18-year-old is still at school. The head of households two

married brothers, who live with him, work on the household land and on additional land that they sharecrop. The household head dates the decline from the stopping of opium poppy cultivation; since then he has had to steadily sell off his livestock to make ends meet. He recalled how his father had nearly 500 sheep and goats 20 years ago, so the decline appears long term. His shop appears not be profitable, and he is in debt, with 1 *jerib* of land mortgaged and with other debts both for the shop and for food requirements. As with all households, he noted that when he bought goods on credit from Khustak Valley shopkeepers, he was often charged interest.

The decline of Household C58 appears to be closely related to a series of deaths in the household and the related economic costs. The head explained the effects of the long-term illness of a son:

We started my son's treatment in the Soviet period; I had taken him to Pakistan for treatment for the first time. When I took him to Pakistan I had taken 30 sheep...I spent the money from their sale on his treatment. Four years ago [2004-5] I took him to Kabul twice, and each time we remained there for one month and spent 80,000 Afs; I sold livestock for this amount of money. During Rabbani's period, I had 170-200 goats and sheep and 18 cows, and 4 oxen. I spent all these livestock on the deaths in our household; I gave charity for each of our household members who died. I spent 40 *sers* of rice, an ox and 8 *sers* of oil on my son's death, and still it was not enough to feed all the people in the village, and again I gave charity the next day. I had livestock in the past, so I was able to cope with household needs by selling them, but now my livestock have decreased in number, so I am not able to meet the household needs. In the past I had farming, the butter we got from our livestock was enough for us for six months, but this year I gave 20 sheep to the shopkeepers I owed to, and still I have bills to pay.

Household C43 was also hit by death: The household head's uncle's death reduced the labour resources of the household, curtailing his opportunities as the sole adult male left in the household, and therefore limiting his ability to leave the household to undertake wage labour, and he is now locked in a cycle of having to borrow and struggling to repay:

I borrowed 10,000 Afs from the shopkeepers and 10,000 Afs from a friend of my uncle. I sold five goats and paid him. In the beginning of this year we borrowed 22,000 Afs: 5,000 Afs from the *shura* head, 7,000 Afs from an uncle and 10,000 Afs from a friend. I have partly repaid him, and only 2,500 Afs of it remains. In total now we owe 12,500 Afs. Our credit is not with interest, it is *hasana*;<sup>75</sup> we pay our credit by selling livestock.

The two examples of decline and its consequences for debt and repayment capture the position of most households in Village C. Households in wealth groups II and III (with the exception of C56) also reported food rationing reducing the quantity and quality of food eaten in order to cope with declining household economies. In Household C56, two nieces and the father died two years ago, leading to debts of more than 20,000 Afs; although the head of the household is a teacher, the payment of his salary is erratic. The son of Household C49 joined the army but was killed, affecting the household economy. The head has not been able to arrange a marriage for his second son. Household C45 is perhaps in the best position of all, largely on account of its male labour resources.

75 *Hasana* means interest-free credit

### 5.3 Villages and households compared

It is worth considering the villages' similarities before focusing on their differences. All villages and households benefited from the expansion of the opium economy in Badakhshan from 2000 to 2006. These were years of relative prosperity with assured food security for most if not all. The years since then have seen the collapse of opium cultivation, a decline in rural employment and wage rates, poor rainfall years and a significant rise in grain prices during 2007-08—challenging economic conditions especially within the context of an unstable political environment. During these economic fluctuations, a long-term decline in farm size has taken place, driven by farm division in a context where the room for expansion of cultivation is limited.

Many of the poorer households have begun food rationing since 2006 with a decline in both the quantity and quality of food consumed. Even in an average year (which most years are not), only one quarter of the 24 households in the three villages meet more than six months of their annual household grain requirements from their own farm production. Nine households (nearly 40%) obtain less than a third of their grain supplies from their own farm production. Thus a majority of households have to secure more than 50% of their grain supplies from other sources. The imperative for income diversification is acute, and the opportunities are limited.

Fundamentally, households seek three basic outcomes: physical security, food security and, linked to these, the ability to reproduce the household through marriage. To what extent have they been able to achieve these given the circumstances? We explore here the food security issue and the extent to which structural and institutional factors, household-specific factors (such as a death) and the interplay between them can account for the differences and similarities between household trajectories and outcomes.

#### *Structural and institutional factors*

The discussion focuses here on two structural dimensions: pre-existing social structures and the behaviour of the village elite, a return to the theme of Section 4. It has been argued that the three villages differ significantly in both these respects, and that this has had implications for household economic trajectories.

Village A's marginal agro-ecological position has limited its agricultural potential, and it has long had a grain deficit, leading to seasonal migration. For whatever reason, the village elite over 60 years ago put the village on an educational track that has yielded dividends both by design and accident. While they are unlikely to have predicted the circumstances of 1980-2001, the commitment of educated villagers to their village and the wider connections that they built ensured that the village maintained that educational investment during the war years and provided physical and economic security to its inhabitants. Whether or not this built on or contributed to the strengthening of a moral economy in the village, it is clearly the case that the village has had a developmental and welfare agenda and the benefits have not been restricted to the elite. The building of a school, roads and a health clinic and the provision of drinking water have all provided general benefits, and the entitlement of the poor to support has remained. The commitment to education across all households, even for those struggling to achieve food security, is not in doubt and has the potential to provide longer-term dividends. For those educated earlier, the benefits are already clear. The public works programme has provided some employment. But while the provision of public goods has reduced some of the elements of structural poverty, it has not and cannot address food and economic security in the immediate or near term.

The resource base of Village B has been the most favourable of the three villages for an agriculturally based economy, but the social structures appear to have been the

most inequitable, with a historically strong landed elite. The self-interest of this elite may have limited the development of education before 1980. While the warrior-like reaction of the village to the communist government may well have been widely supported, this did not correspond with a concern for internal physical security, and abuse of power characterised the behaviour of the powerful both before and after 2001. The extraordinary wealth generated by the opium economy after 2001, while clearly benefiting everyone, disproportionately benefited those with resources of land or labour. The degree of structural poverty has therefore not been reduced to the extent of Village A, although the opportunities for agriculturally based employment are greater here than in the other two villages.

Village C, with limited resources, small and politically marginal, appears to have insignificant social differences. But there is also no strong village elite, although a significant protectorate status for the village has been achieved, providing physical security. The village's marginal agrarian economy has long meant a dependence on labouring opportunities in the district's rural economy, but there has been a long-term decline in its livestock resources. Public good provision is probably least in this village, in part because of location.

### *Household-specific factors*

How have households managed to work with these various village endowments, constraints and opportunities in the construction of their livelihoods? Two general points should first be made. First, household trajectories have to be understood within the context of the particular stage of the household lifecycle in which a household finds itself. Thus, older households with married sons living in the household (such as Household B69) or working elsewhere need to be contrasted with younger households where the majority of children may be dependents (as in Households B66 or A36). Second, most but not all households (for example, A24) benefited considerably from the opium poppy economy, although the scale of that benefit depended on location as well as access to land.

What individual factors have contributed to households' prospering economically? Inherited social position based on significant landholdings is one factor; inherited land secured a livelihood for Households B64 and B75, although as these households have aged and divided their security has declined. Household A46 was in a similar position. But all three household life cycles have been characterised by declining agricultural resources. Many of those interviewed reported that their parents had more land than they did, indicating a long-term decline in agriculture as a source of livelihood.

Against this, the rise of Household B69 through an agriculture-based livelihood should be noted, although this pattern was only found among the study households in village B. The households that have prospered in Village A (none prospered in Village C) did not do so through agriculture but through employment based on education. The head of Household A38, although he has both land and a salary, is slowly selling land because of his large number of dependents, but his long-term prospects are likely to be good.

The case of Household B69 illustrates how individual action—the conscious building of assets—is possible and can lead to the desired outcomes; although, as noted, the head of this household has been lucky to have a number of sons who were able to join the labour market at the boom of the opium economy. There are other examples of such action, although the long-term outcomes are less clear. For example, the son in Household A24, by gaining experience driving, managed to secure a salaried position as a driver in his village and on this basis was able to borrow money to get married. (This will be discussed further in Section 6.) Equally there are households that are keeping their children in school despite the loss of their labour in so that they will have a better life; this was particularly evident in Village A.

While these factors have contributed to individuals, primarily in the wealthier households, finding ways to prosper despite the circumstances, there are also many events that can lead to a decline in economic fortunes. Sometimes, as described for Household A23, a series of events, through a combination of bad luck or misjudgement, can lead to economic decline. In this case conflict within the household contributed to the decline. Injury or ill health of the main household labourer where there is no other male labour can also precipitate a rapid decline in the household economy, as happened in households A27 and A33. One or more deaths, as most notably seen in Household C58, particularly if these are associated with medical costs, can have a long-term negative effect. The consequence of economic decline is increased food insecurity, leading as has been seen to food rationing.

For most households, shocks, such as deaths, injury or conflict, can easily precipitate a household's decline whether it is rich or poor; it is the precariousness of household economies in these three villages that stands out. One of the direct consequences of economic decline is restriction of men's ability to finance marriage, affecting their ability to secure their future. Equally, the ability to hold a household together and secure physical and economic security can be a key to household survival, with consequences for the individuals.

The discussion so far has focused on the household as a unit. The next section explores in more detail the role of the household, the efforts that go into constructing it and what it offers to its members.

## 6. The Institution of the Household

### 6.1 Introduction

Nancy Dupree described the household as “the most influential social institution in Afghan society.”<sup>76</sup> This section explores the changing conditions for getting married and the roles and responsibilities within marriage under circumstances in which the household (along with the village) has provided the main source of safety and economic security. The structures of the household and village and their strong patriarchal attributes,<sup>77</sup> underpinned by gendered norms, clearly carry costs with respect to individual autonomy. But the ways in which these work themselves out against the benefits gained depend on personality, gender, age, household structure, economic class and location.

The neglect of the household and village in part has reflected the emphasis on “modernising” Afghanistan’s public sphere of state and markets, with the assumption that these would drag the private sphere of village and household out of its tradition-burdened past. It was this that Louis Dupree<sup>78</sup> implied when he wrote that “the village builds a ‘mud curtain’ around itself for protection against the outside world.” The village has thus been seen as an enduring symbol of rural backwardness and tradition, not least for its containment of women. Hector Maletta, for example, wrote of rural women “in fact living behind a double mud curtain: the metaphorical one surrounding the village and the very real, thick and windowless mud-wall surrounding each homestead from which woman are seldom permitted to venture out.”<sup>79</sup>

Such a viewpoint is a short step to talking about the “condition of Afghan women,” making comparisons with international indices of women’s well-being (health and education, for example)<sup>80</sup> on which Afghan women perform badly. Attention is also rightly drawn to the poor position of women in relation to men with respect to rights and social participation and their exposure to violence within the home. But treating women as a category, and a tendency to portray them as victims, is based on assumptions about their lives inside the household. The donor agenda on gender,<sup>81</sup> with its normative view of the desirability of individuality, agency and autonomy within the context of a market economy, appears blind to the circumstances within which Afghan households live, the significance of the household as an institution and the reasons for the rules of obligations and loyalty that structure it.

Consistent with the normative state-building exercise, much of the recent literature on gender has focused on the role and rights of Afghan women as economic agents.<sup>82</sup> This has included women’s participation in the labour market and its limits;<sup>83</sup> their role in

76 Nancy Dupree, “The Family During Crisis in Afghanistan,” *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 35, no. 2 (Spring 2004), 311.

77 D. Kandiyoti, “Gender Power and Contestation: Rethinking ‘Bargaining with Patriarchy,’” in *Feminist Visions of Development: Gender Analysis and Policy*, ed. C. Jackson and R. Pearson, 135-52 (London: Routledge, 1998).

78 Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 249.

79 Hector Maletta, “Gender and Employment in Rural Afghanistan, 2003-5,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 43, no. 2 (2008): 173-196.

80 Maletta, “Gender and Employment in Rural Afghanistan,” 176.

81 Dupree, “The Family During Crisis in Afghanistan.”

82 E. Stites, “Afghan Women: Afghan Livelihoods,” in *Reconstructing Agriculture in Afghanistan*, ed. A. Pain and J. Sutton (Rome and Rugby: FAO and Practical Action), 189-212.

83 Maletta, “Gender and Employment in Rural Afghanistan.”

agriculture,<sup>84</sup> which is greater than many believe, and ownership of assets<sup>85</sup> revealing the disjuncture between what Sharia says with respect to inheritance and what customary practices permit. Studies of credit confirm a picture of women actively involved in both informal and formal credit systems.<sup>86</sup> Thus, this post-2001 literature on women in Afghanistan reflects a wider tendency to treat gender as a subject rather than as a social relationship.<sup>87</sup>

The literature on conjugality in Afghanistan is limited and has little to say on the internal dynamics of households. Nancy Tapper's classic study<sup>88</sup> of marriage practices in one Pashtun tribal society in northern Afghanistan explored the changing role of marriage under conditions of increasing resource scarcity and conflict in a multiethnic setting prior to 1978. She emphasised that marriage practices have a central role in social reproduction and are critical to understanding wider social relations within the society and household concerns for social and economic survival. Her evidence pointed to the dynamic nature of marriage as an institution within this society responding to social and environmental changes. She was primarily concerned with the formation of marriage rather than the substance of marital relations after marriage, and this is difficult to generalise from to other geographical and cultural contexts in Afghanistan.

Deborah Smith's recent study on decision-making in relation to marriage drew attention to the diversity of processes, the degrees of choice and force in making marriage decisions, the role of cultural norms, and the tension between individual wishes and cultural pressures.<sup>89</sup> While the study drew from several cultural contexts within Afghanistan, its focus on processes of marriage formation in relation to household violence addressed only one aspect of conjugal relations. But Smith's observations on individuals' awareness of the conflict between their wishes and what social norms determine invited consideration of the role and strength of such norms in setting the rules for marriage, questions as to how prescriptive these are but also as to why this should be so.

The experiences of the households that participated in this study can help to shed light on these issues. The section provides summary portraits of five households with differing circumstances and characteristics, selected from the three villages. It then explores four themes, drawing on empirical material from each household, to investigate the importance of marriage in their lives. The four themes are decisions regarding marriage, the costs of marriage and how they are met, life and gendered relations within marriage and the break-up of households (either when joint households separate or when couples divorce) and its consequences. Accompanying the exploration of these four themes is an investigation, supported by additional material from other households in the study villages, of the role of social norms in determining behaviour and of the areas of cooperation and conflict within the household.

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84 Jo Grace, "Gender Roles in Agriculture: Case Studies of Five Villages in Northern Afghanistan" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2003).

85 Jo Grace, "Who Owns the Farm? Rural Women's Access to Land and Livestock" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2004).

86 F. Klijn and A. Pain, *Finding the Money*; Paula Kantor, *From Access to Impact: Microcredit and Rural Livelihoods in Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2007).

87 Cecile Jackson, "Resolving Risk? Marriage and Creative Conjugality," *Development and Change* 38, no. 1 (2007): 107-129.

88 Nancy Tapper, *Bartered Brides: Politics, Gender and Marriage in an Afghan Tribal Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

89 D.J. Smith, *Decisions, Desires and Diversity: Marriage Practices in Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2009).



## 6.2 Five households

This section briefly presents each household's circumstances. The letter at the beginning of the household code indicates the village to which it belongs (for example, Household A38 is from Village A).

### *Household A38*

A38 is a single household of 12: a husband (48), wife (23) and ten children. Six of the children, age 12 to 29, are children of the husband's first wife, who died; four, all girls age 5 or younger, are children of the second wife, who is the only nonliterate adult in the household. She was the niece of the husband's first wife and was married at 15. The husband, one of the few *hajjis* in the village, is an educated man who taught in the local school before being employed by a local NGO as an educator. His father was the *arbob* before the war and left 12 ha of irrigated land and 600 goats and sheep; his older brother was killed by the government in 1979. He graduated from college and has maintained important external connections that have, for example, enabled his eldest son to enter Kabul University. Although he has no formal position in the village, he is a respected and influential figure. The household economy is secure, given his salary, although his land and livestock assets have slowly been sold over the last decade to pay for medical costs, his *haj* and other debts. He remains the largest landowner in the sample (and probably in the village) with about 20 *jeribs* (4 ha.) of irrigated land.

### *Household A27*

A27 is a single household in deep poverty, with a history of deaths and a violent husband. It is a small household with only four members: a husband (75), a wife (45), a son of 30 who is deaf and mute and a daughter of 13, currently at school, who is the only literate member of the household. The husband lost his first wife, the mother of his son, and nine children who died young. The second wife also lost three children between the ages of 1 and 5. The household has been in serious economic decline and is possibly the poorest household sampled in this village. Previously they had a better life when he worked at an oil mill, but injury incapacitated him, and the household is surviving on the limited wage work he could find, charity, the baskets that his wife could make and exchange for wheat, and the food given for the girl's attendance at school. The 0.5 *jeribs* (0.1 ha) of land that was mortgaged during the drought to provide food was recovered by the sale of his only ox, resulting in him being unable to cultivate the land, which is now farmed out to sharecroppers. He sold land to marry his second wife and had a few years back also sold an orchard to pay for the funeral of his unmarried sister and for food. Since the collapse of opium and the rise in grain prices, this household has had to cut back on consumption, living basically on milk, tea and bread.

### *Household B69*

B69 is a wealthy joint household with 11 people, including a husband (61), a wife (53), and three married sons and their wives and children. One son remains unmarried; all members of the household are nonliterate. The husband, as discussed in Section 5, has built the household economy up over time, starting life as a shepherd with limited land and prospering through work, resourcefulness and luck. His rise to relative prosperity and the contribution of opium in this rise and the sale of his land in order to marry his first son are indicative of his strategic use of resources to build the household and its economy. Labour rich with four sons who came of age in time to work productively during the opium years, the household is relatively land poor by Village B standards with only two *jeribs* (0.4 ha). The husband was gradually able to expand the land he sharecropped as his household aged.

### **Household B74**

B74 is a household of nine with a husband (62), a wife (43) and four daughters (one married with an absentee husband), and three grandsons. One daughter was injured by falling rubble and became disabled when their house was bombed during the war. The husband lost all his livestock and a brother in the conflict. Only the youngest daughter is literate. The husband comes from the village, but the wife comes from Baharak and was married off at a young age by her brothers. The household was landless because the land they inherited was sold to pay for the husband's brother's marriage. In the village, the husband seems to have survived as a petty trader, leader of prayers (*imam*) and casual labourer. Three years ago the household moved to the town from the village, and the husband has had intermittent casual labour while the wife has found more regular employment as a seamstress.

The first four cases have exemplified different aspects of conjugal relations. It was only in Village C that this study found cases (three) of household heads and men who had not married. One, Household C56, was headed by a younger brother who was a teacher who had delayed marriage, although an elder married brother was also part of the household. The other two cases involved men who could not afford to marry. The struggle to get married was found in all the villages. The economic decline with the decline of opium delayed the possibility of marriage for some; others had joined the army to raise the necessary marriage costs. A further group of men, found only in Village C, married into their wives' homes. Why this practice should be restricted to Village C is unclear; it may reflect the small size of the village and the relatively small pool of potential marriage partners to draw on from elsewhere.

### **Household C46**

C46 is an example of a household where the man failed to marry. A household of three, it consists of the head of the household, the widow of his deceased brother and her son. The household head came from a poor background and inherited a small piece of land jointly with two brothers. One brother married and had children, and when he died, part of the land was sold to pay for funeral expenses. More of the land was lost when it was mortgaged during the drought to buy food and could not be recovered. When his brother died, it would have been customary for him to have married the widow, but this did not happen in this case

## **6.3 Marriage**

Evident across all the study villages was a fundamental concern with getting sons and daughters married. As will be seen, the sale of assets, the generation of income and the taking on of debt were often associated with paying for a marriage; this was often the major expenditure that a household had to face and plan for. Beyond the pervasive desire to be married and have children, there are additional social norms that drive the imperative. The first is well illustrated by the comment of the head of household A34 indicating how marriage established a man, giving him responsibility and position: "My sons are married; they now have some organisation in their lives; they feel responsible and work; they don't do any immoral things."

Given the norms governing inheritance and patrilocal marriage, getting daughters settled in a good marriage is an equal concern but with a different imperative. For sons, the ability to command household labour and maintain a joint household helps provide security in old age. For daughters, marriage helps maintain the wider social networks on which the household depends. As Tapper puts it,<sup>90</sup> marriage is central to household

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90 Nancy Tapper, *Bartered Brides: Politics, Gender and Marriage in an Afghan Tribal Society*

concerns for social and economic survival.

What is abundantly clear, confirming the findings of Smith,<sup>91</sup> is that the two key parties to the marriage, the bride and groom, often have little say in the marriage decision, although the degree of coercion into marriage is on a spectrum rather than absolute. At one end of the spectrum, instances of absolute coercion were found, all in Village B. The head of Household B34 described how his daughter was forced into marriage during the commander era, although in this case the coercion came from outside the household:

I had a daughter during the commander time; a boy whose uncle was with the commander wanted to marry my daughter, and he used his uncle...and married my daughter. I did not want my daughter's marriage with him, but they were powerful and had authority on the village, and finally he succeeded in marrying her. She also did not want to marry him. Her husband...I do not like, because he is a proud person. That time they wanted to kill me, and sent me to Hazrat-e-Saeed carrying thousands of shells on my back, and fired many shells on me but God saved me. When I rejected their proposal for marriage, my father-in-law came to me and said, "Do not reject their proposal, otherwise they will kill you." When I returned from Hazrat-e-Saeed they had gathered three or four elders and they threw 3,000 Afs in front of me and took my daughter.

The reason given by the wife of the head of Household B74 for their move from the village was the unwelcome attentions of a married man toward one of her daughters.

He had three wives and always sent people to woo and wanted to marry my daughter, who is married now, as my husband was a poor person and did not have any brothers. One day...he stood on the wall and said to my daughter, "I love you and I will marry you whenever I can." I was on the roof and saw that the situation was not good, he wanted to go into the room where the girl was sitting, so I threw a stone at him, which hit his forehead. On the street people gathered and we fought at the time [verbally]. But the man came to me and said: "Alam Nisa! I will not let you alone until I marry one of your three daughters." He wanted to come in, and my daughter brought out the gun from the house, and I wanted to kill him but he fled. I watched our house for three nights with that gun. I fired three shells at him...he wanted to enter the house.

While these were the two most overt cases of force or attempted force in marriage, respect or duty to their parents gives sons and daughters little room to resist. A son from Household B34 commented:

It is three years since I married. I did not interfere in making decisions about the marriage. My parents selected my spouse. In our village it is common that parents decide about their children's marriage. Sons cannot say anything. There may be one in each thousand sons who disobeys the decision of his parents regarding marriage. Girls obey their parents too.

His sister-in-law was clear about her lack of choice:

I did not agree to marry my cousin, because I was very young, almost 13 years old. I was almost forced to marry my cousin; my mother had died and I was living with my stepmother. My parents wanted me to marry my cousin. I did not want to because I did not like him, but it happened. I refused, but they did not accept this...I would be happy if I was divorced.

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(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

91 Smith, *Decisions, Desires and Diversity: Marriage Practices in Afghanistan*.

The wife of the head of Household A38 expressed her anger with both her parents and her husband about being married off at an early age without consultation: “I was very young and I was forced to marry him.” The husband was clear that his second marriage was based on expediency: after the death of his first wife, “I thought I must select my second wife from my own relatives who will look after my children. I only married for the second time to have someone to look after my children, who were very small; otherwise I didn’t need to.”

Older men, particularly when taking a second wife after the death of the first, or when wealthy enough to take a second wife, may well have more choice over marriage decisions. In Household C46, a widow decided not to remarry, as her daughter explained:

My mother did not want to get married again after my father’s death. Many people advised her to get married...it is a custom in our village to marry one’s brother’s widow, but she did not accept this, saying, “I will bring up my two children; I will not get married again.”

The decision not to marry was viewed by the interviewers as uncommon for a woman but possible. The arrangement whereby the uncle lived with the household but apparently slept outdoors was seen as something the widow set up to keep her independence while keeping up appearances.

Significantly, greater independence in the making of marriage decisions was encountered in Village A. The wife of the head of Household A38 commented on her eldest stepdaughter’s marriage to her cousin, an arrangement that they had made themselves, which the wife saw as highly unusual. But she said that “the children of the period do according to their wishes,” something she was not entirely at ease with, particularly with respect to girls’ education: “The girls who are studying at school have become impudent.”

While the wife clearly had views on the daughters’ lack of contribution to the housework, her comment also indicated the effects of education on changing individual perceptions and assertions of independence, in terms of both household roles and, as indicated above, marriage. Her eldest stepson, a university student, was under pressure from her husband to get married but was refusing on the grounds that his education was not completed. The husband commented, “I am responsible for the whole household but I have no decision about his marriage,” although the wife expected that he would eventually select a wife for his son.

In summary, while the imperative for marriage is strong, the norms governing it are highly variable and may be changing. While the study households in Village B illustrate the greatest degree of obvious coercion, choice was limited in all villages. Households in Village A illustrated emerging change in social norms.

## 6.4 Meeting the costs of marriage

Closely linked to decisions regarding marriage are issues of meeting the costs of marriage. Comments by the head of Household B77 sum up the changing cost of marriage and the effects that this has had on the ability to get married:

During Rabanni, despite the drought and other problems, marriage used to happen easily due to income obtained from opium poppy. I witnessed 100 marriages in a year at that time. Boys and girls used to marry at the age of 15 to 16. Now it is the opposite. Men and women cannot marry even at the age of 30 these days due to bad economic conditions. In the last two years, since the opium poppy has gone, we do not see ten marriages per year. In addition, changes in customs and traditions have made marriages more expensive. In our area the only income source is to send the children to the national army or police.

Everyone was in agreement on the increase in costs. The head of Household A38 gave his own example: “Yes, I got married in 1999 in Rabbani’s period and paid 80,000,000 Afs, which is equal to 40,000 Afs of the present. The marriage price was 100,000 Afs last year, which included all marriage expenses.”

Others in Village A agreed on the rise of marriage costs and its effect. The wife of the head of Household A34 stated:

In the past the total expenses of a marriage came to only 10,000 Afs, but now the expenses of a marriage cannot be less than 300,000 Afs: 200,000 Afs for the bride price and 100,000 Afs for other expenses. Now there are about 300 boys and girls in the village who have remained unmarried because of high bride prices. It is very difficult for poor people to find 300,000 Afs. The young people have decided to migrate to Iran to find work and save money to get married; they don’t have any other solution.

Less clear are the reasons for the rise in costs. Undoubtedly there was inflation during the opium economy, when people had resources to spend on marriage, but one might have expected the price to fall with opium’s decline. This has not happened, perhaps indicating changing expectations brought about by the relative prosperity of the opium years. Most respondents agreed that the main purpose of the bride price was not to profit the bride’s father but to provide the dowry (the cost of providing for brides outfit and household good to marry with) and meet other expenditures of marriage. But as the head of Household C46 commented, “There are some households who spend the bride price for their own needs and do not provide a dowry for their daughter.” There are also those who do not agree with the dowry system or the increase in bride price. The mullah in Village B (the head of Household B66) commented on the 30,000 Afs dowry received for his daughter’s marriage:

We noticed that the groom’s household is poor. We accepted this amount of bride price based on our understanding of the economic situation of my son-in-law’s household. We arranged the wedding party in accordance with what was given to us by my son-in-law’s household. I personally do not agree with high bride prices.

Respondents described a number of responses to the increasing costs of marriage. (A past practice of exchange marriage<sup>92</sup>, which minimises costs, has fallen into disuse and is now seen as socially unacceptable.) There is a preference for seeking marriage with relatives rather than nonrelatives, as this is seen to be cheaper. Matrilocal marriage also occurred, but only in Village C. This was seen as an inferior way for a man to establish a household, since he is seen as becoming subservient to the head of the household into which he is marrying. The head of Household C43 gave another example:

One is Muhammad. There are some people who follow this tradition and are forced to do this because of poverty, because they cannot find the bride price, still Muhammad hears the taunt of his brother-in-law. I think this is the act of a shameless person who lives with his brother-in-law or father-in-law after getting married. This shows one’s weakness, to live in someone’s house and be dependent on them.

In the past there was some willingness to sell land, as of the head of Household B69 did for his son’s wedding. This is probably less likely now that the price of land has fallen. There is also the option of borrowing, but only those in a position to secure debt can do this. An example of this was a son of Household A24 who, on account of his salaried position, was able to take out a large loan for his marriage. The bride’s household was

<sup>92</sup> An exchange marriage is one in which two girls are exchanged between households where each marry the brother of the other.

seen to be demanding an excessive amount; his mother commented:

[That] household is not a good household because they were demanding a lot of money for the bride price. Then we sent some elders to reduce this amount, and they said to the household, “you are selling your daughter,” and they said, “yes, we are.” We took a loan for this money. All the rice needed for the wedding was a loan (150,000 Afs) from the shopkeeper. My son took 100,000 Afs as a loan from friends in the office as *qase harsana* [interest-free]. Because of the salary, our life is good and my son succeeded in getting married.

Most households are not in this position; the remaining options are to delay consideration of marriage or, as indicated above, to migrate to Iran for work or to join the army or police. The emotional costs arising from the difficulties of getting married should not be underestimated.

## 6.5 Life within marriage

This discussion focuses on the gendered division of labour, income generation and asset ownership, its links to household composition and the contrasts between single and joint households. It also explores points of bargaining and conflict within the household.

### *Gendered divisions in the household*

All the evidence points to an extremely gendered division of tasks, corresponding to a conceptualisation of separate spheres within marriage.<sup>93</sup> The activities required for household provisioning (farm management, farm labour, shepherding and so forth) are largely undertaken by men, and even these tasks are divided systematically between the male labour in the household. Thus the head of Household B70, characterising practices for most of the study households, described the division of labour between his sons: “In my own household, one of my sons is doing farming, another is responsible for livestock, and two of them are busy in house-related activities [fuel collection].”

If the men command the management of the food supplies and income, women control the domestic sphere and may know little of the male domain. The wife of the head of Household A27 commented, “I don’t know about it, my husband knows. He meets all the household expenses.” The wife of the head of Household B69 was unable to provide details on the household land holdings; but with respect to the division of labour in domestic work, she held sway over her three daughters-in-law. During the interview, one of them came in to ask her for instructions about what should be cooked for lunch. Interviewers reported that there was a division of labour with one daughter-in-law cooking, a second cleaning and a third baking bread, a major requirement in a large household. This degree of task specialisation requires little coordination; “everyone knows their responsibilities,” as the head of Household B70 put it. There is little within the sphere of household public good provision (food supplies, child care and household maintenance) to negotiate over.

It is also the case that women have control over more resources and income than might be thought given the gender divisions, although there was no evidence of these being used to challenge normative roles or alter distribution of resources within the household. During the years of opium cultivation, not only were women drawn in to provide labour for weeding (there are accounts of them negotiating payments for this<sup>94</sup>) but they also gained the right to harvest the residual opium after the main harvest and dispose of

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93 S. Lundberg and R.A. Pollak, “Separate Spheres Bargaining and the Marriage Market,” *The Journal of Political Economy* 101, no. 6 (1993): 988-1010.

94 Pain, *Opium Poppy and Informal Credit*.

that as they wished. Thus a daughter-in-law in Household B69 helped fund her husband's migration by selling opium that she held along with a cow she had been given by her father.

Women in all villages, particularly Village B, have major responsibilities for the management of livestock in the summer pastures. In Villages A and C, women collect wild cumin. The income from this, while neither regular nor significant, can generate up to \$100 a year in good years, and it is seen as their income. It was reported to be used both for household purposes and for purchasing dresses or other personal items. There was persistent talk of a woman's right to have an inheritance from her father, particularly with respect to land. But it was extremely rare for this right to be claimed; many reported that "it is not the custom in this village to do this." The reasons given corresponded with those offered by Grace:<sup>95</sup> land holdings were too small, brothers had a greater need, and women did not need the inheritance or did not wish to claim it.

None of the interviews revealed any friction over intra-household distribution of public goods, and equity was emphasised. The head of Household B70 said that it was important to treat everyone equally for the peace and survival of the household:

One of the important ways that has helped me to keep them all together is that I always try to treat them the same. All of them are the same for me and I don't make a difference between them. For example, whenever I go to the bazaar and I buy five soaps for one of my daughters-in-law, I buy the same quantity for the others too. I have the same attitude toward all of my sons, too. If I don't care about this kind of justice, then it will cause separation of the household.

Whether or not they achieved it themselves, respondents persistently referred to the ideal of having large joint households, an ideal that is supported by the frequency of their existence: 13 of the 24 study households were joint households (Table 2). In joint households, the demands for cooperation and the potential for conflict inevitably expand. It is not just a matter of the relations of a wife with a husband but also with a father-in-law, brothers-in-law, mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. Households that had recently separated (for example, A34, where the son with an independent income source had made the decision to move out) often suffered severe economic consequences. The reasons for wanting a large household are clear: As a man from Household B77 put it, "A big household can also protect [itself] against problems and conflicts emerging in the village. No one can fight with a big household, because a big household can properly defend itself." Significantly, this comment came from Village B, which not only has the highest proportion of joint households in the sample but also apparently the least internal security. Combined with the need for physical security is the need for diverse labour sources in order to handle the seasonally labour-intensive tasks of the farm and to respond to the riskiness of a mountain economy that requires periodic outmigration for household survival.

Thus, the management of large joint households, given the evidence of pooling of income in cash and kind, could lead to an acceptance of Becker's altruist model: the benevolent patriarch ensuring distribution of goods in the household but ruling with an iron hand both the male and female spheres of his domain.<sup>96</sup> There are certainly elements of this, but there is also awareness that there has to be consultation; a number of household heads referred to the need to build and keep consensus on key decisions. But as Jackson has commented with respect to the notion of the patriarchal bargain,<sup>97</sup> and as will

95 Grace, "Who Owns the Farm?"

96 G.S. Becker, *A Treatise on the Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

97 Jackson, "Resolving Risk," 124; Kandiyoti, "Gender Power and Contestation."

be seen below, women have power and they use it. One cannot assume that the loci of decision-making for key aspects of the household economy apply to all aspects of conjugal relations.

### ***Bargaining and conflicts***

Any discussion of bargaining or threats must be balanced with the acknowledgement that duty, trust, respect, companionship and love exist in relationships that generate and sustain interest and commitment to the welfare of others. These were evident in many households. The head of Household B75 had an undoubted love and affection for his youngest wife, and his preferential treatment of her caused rifts between the wives. The head of household B65 openly said to his wife, “I would suffer from many difficulties if I was not married to you”; in Household A34 the wife was openly warm and admiring of her husband and talked of his kindness toward her. Many talked of their shared concern for their children, both sons and daughters. When the son of one household migrated to Iran, his absence caused such anxiety for his parents that he was persuaded to return. A daughter’s unhappy marriage was a matter of deep concern to her parents; the wife in Household B66 commented, “I would like to take care of my daughter and ask her to stay with us but cannot due to unfavourable norms in the society; if we keep her with us, people will say that we are interfering in our son-in-law’s responsibilities.” Parents in other households expressed satisfaction that a daughter had married and now had a good life.

But interviews also revealed a number of areas of conflict in marriages, about unhappiness in marriage (Household A38) and having children (Households A38 and A27) as well as decisions over children’s marriage and education and the mobility of women.

There were more conflicts in joint households, although it is not easy to distinguish specific conflict between spouses from the circumstances of the joint household in which the husband might have little authority and the wife is more subject to the rule of her mother-in-law.

In Household A38, there was conflict over birth control. The wife wanted it, but the husband did not agree (she reported him as saying that it was God’s will to have more children). She ignored her husband’s wishes and went to get herself injected against pregnancy. The result was that “my husband got angry with me and didn’t talk to me for three days.” Other examples of resistance were also found: The wife in Household B74, for example, said that she was told by her husband not to attend weddings or funerals on her own but, since he was usually out at work, she went secretly. Other informants said that informal protests within marriage could include a reduction in the quality of food and cleaning services, withdrawal of sexual favours and silence, which the husband in Household A38 also used to indicate anger. Husbands could always threaten or use violence, as in Household A27, where the wife reported:

He is very cruel person; he beat me too much last summer. I had given my daughter some milk. When he entered the house and saw my daughter drinking the milk, he suddenly started beating me with a stick, saying “Why don’t you give milk to [my son]?” and I was injured on my head and it started bleeding. He always treats me in this way. Sometimes he comes from outside when I am busy baking bread. If he sees any burnt he starts beating me. It has become a habit to him, there is always anger on his face; I have never seen him smiling. There is nobody in our village who treats his household like my husband, but I am unable to show any response when he beats me, and my daughter becomes very upset with his behaviour, which hurts me much.

Assertive men are not all violent and can also be matched by strong women. In Household A34, the head kept a joint household together, did not allow separation of his married



sons and controlled all the income and expenditures. He was matched by the strength of personality of his wife. She spoke of her husband with admiration, of his kindness and the fact that he did not fight her. In turn, she was very much in control of her two daughters-in-law, who had said that they would like separate lives. She would not agree to this, playing on her authority over her sons: “I will never let them have a separate life as long as I am alive. My children also obey their parents and never reject parents’ words. They do not listen to their wives if they try to convince them to have separate lives.”

Nor is all violence between men and women. The youngest of three wives in Household B75 reported how she was treated by the second wife of her husband:

I was 14 years old when I married, and she used to beat and punch me, and I wept and could not say anything; she treated me this way for five years. Once the first wife of my husband said to me, “Why do you not say anything to her when she beats you? Do not let her beat you in this way; defend yourself.” One day she kicked me over something, and I grasped her hair and laid her down under my feet and beat her. At once my husband entered the room and asked what was going on. I told him the whole story, that she had been beating me for the last five years but I had never said anything to her. “You have done well,” he said. And he also beat her. After that she never said anything to me.

The daughter-in-law in Household B69 revealed the capacity of a woman to stand her ground. Her mother-in-law had been pressing her son to take a second wife because no children had been born of the marriage. The daughter-in-law directly challenged her husband:

I had told my husband to get himself examined first before blaming me for not having children; if the result is positive then I am at fault. Then we decided to...get ourselves examined. The doctors wanted his sperm to examine but he failed to provide it. In spite of that he blames me. If he marries but fails to look after me properly, I will try to get divorced. My husband also thinks that if I cannot get on with his new wife, he will divorce me. Last year, I fought a lot with my husband. The fight was over children. I went to my father’s house in this village and spent almost seven months there. During this period, my husband found a widow in the village and decided to marry her. The widow told my husband to divorce me before marrying her. I did not accept this decision and asked him to take me to a doctor first and then decide. He did not take me to a doctor but also didn’t marry.

Beyond dispute and contention, overt and hidden, there is also evidence of more direct action by women in removing themselves from the marital home, perhaps temporarily as was reported in Household A38. But more long-term cases occur, as shown by the daughter-in-law in Household B69. There are various other references to this in the household interviews. Leaving the marital home is an option that women have but men do not. Its significance and the social disapprobation attached to it varies according to circumstances; for example, the wife in Household B74, whose daughter was in an unhappy marriage, wanted her to return to the home but was fearful of offending social norms. If the wife was considered to have deserted a good husband and to have behaved improperly, then she was condemned; interviews in Village C pointed to one such example. If, on the other hand, the husband was seen to have failed to provide for his wife or to have behaved badly, then there was greater sympathy for the woman. In many cases a wife’s flight to her parental home was seen more as a bargaining tactic which would force the husband to try to make amends: In the Village C example, the times that the husband had come and sought reconciliation were described in detail.

The case of Household B74 was perhaps the most striking of all with respect to a woman's autonomy. The interview transcripts reveal a woman who was not afraid to act or to speak her mind; she was openly critical of her husband during his interview (unlike other wives, she attended it), stating that "work and income is mine and you are a useless man." It is clear that she initiated the migration to the city against her husband's wishes and took on and repaid debts of which her husband was ignorant. She reported in her own interview that she had taken her brothers to court in order to claim her inheritance rights and had out-bribed them to secure her inheritance of land on which to build a house. She herself reported threatening an employer who she considered had not treated her husband properly.

She was certainly a controversial figure in the village. Whenever the concepts of *haya* and *behaya* (proper and improper behaviour) were discussed, she was given as an example of a woman who was *behaya*. One respondent explained the concept of *haya*:

*Haya* is half of a Muslim's faith; for example, if a woman goes out without covering her face and other nonrelatives see her, she is called *behaya*. *Haya* is not only necessary for women, but also for all Muslim men;<sup>98</sup> they should never be *behaya*. If a man looks at others' daughters he is called *behaya* ...the only reason for his moving [Household B74]...is his wife comes from Baharak...his wife does not obey him and he is not able to control her, that is why when she wanted to move to Baharak he could not say anything and he had to accept what she said...he had three young daughters but did not have any sons. If he had a son he would not agree to move. He cannot go anywhere for any work leaving his daughters and wife alone...people will think badly if he left them alone...and his wife is a free woman; we call this kind of woman *behaya*.

## 6.6 The break-up of the household: Household separation and divorce

There are two ways that households can break up: Married couples can separate from a joint household or marriages can end in divorce. As the example of Household A34 earlier illustrates, heads of households and their wives can exert considerable authority to prevent sons and their wives from separating from the household, playing on the sons' duty to their parents as long as they are alive. The advantage lies with the household heads, because sons and their wives have little opportunity to establish economic independence and gain control over land until they inherit it. When the son separated from Household A23, this reflected his independent income from his salaried position. It was clear from the head of Household A23's comments that this had a very negative effect on his household economy.

But joint households do separate; the outcome is not necessarily seen as negative, and not all mothers-in-law hold their daughters-in-law in thrall. The wife of a land-rich household (B75) was delighted when six sons and their wives separated from the household:

Now I am happy with few members in the household. In the past there was a lot of work in the house and we could not find a moment to have meals, but now our ears are quiet and we have little work to do. When we were living with my daughters-in-law they did not do any work, I myself did cooking and I was a fat, large and beautiful woman, all my face was burnt because of baking much bread, and the six daughters-in-law kept sitting in their rooms

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98 In Village C, an incident in which a man had a liaison with a married woman which led to their marriage was also described as *behaya*.

and ate the bread I cooked. They just looked after their children and did not do any other work. My heart started beating when I cooked anything, because I was afraid whether what I had cooked was enough for all of them. We separated happily; all of my sons separated in one day...it was a day of happiness and a day of sadness.

Divorce, the ultimate breakdown, happens. While for Pashtuns divorce is extremely rare,<sup>99</sup> it does occur among Tajiks, although infrequently. The scope for women to divorce men is very limited, but there are cases when, for example, the source of infertility can be linked to the man. The decision to divorce rests largely with men, but there is social disapproval of it, as expressed in the Badakhshani proverb “give a wife to a widower, a dog to a divorced man.” The daughter-in-law in Household B69 could challenge her husband to divorce her; if he were to do so, it would put him in a bad light. Indeed, the remarriage market was reported to be much more favourable to divorced women than divorced men, with women getting remarried sooner.<sup>100</sup> But as Household C46 showed, it is also possible for widows to establish independence and resist social pressure to remarry.

## 6.7 Discussion

The evidence from the study households makes clear: (1) the extent to which the arrangement of marriages lies outside the control of those getting married and (2) the role of social norms regulating marital behaviour. This is reflected in the degree of gendered specialisation of household tasks and the limits on women’s economic activities. There is clearly an awareness, regarding either the marriage contract<sup>101</sup> or married life, of the costs and compromises required or of the tensions between individual desires and cultural norms. But this does not mean that marriage deprives many of the ability to contest the conditions they find themselves in or to draw benefits and support from it. Thus it is not a lack of perception on the part of women (or men), as Sen<sup>102</sup> would have it, of where their best interests lie, but more an understanding of what the circumstances permit and of the imperative to get married.

The key questions are why there is such allegiance to institutional norms that clearly compromise the scope for individuality and autonomy and why such social norms are proving so durable. It is insufficient to simply view the norms as problematic and in need of reconstruction. The marriage practices that Tapper<sup>103</sup> described in 1978 as being central to a household’s concern for social and economic survival correspond to present circumstances. As James Putzel<sup>104</sup> has put it, “security requirements trump all other development needs” with respect to the survival functions of a state, a capability which the Afghanistan state has very clearly failed to deliver. Similarly, the first function of a household and the community within which it lives is to provide the physical security that cannot be assured from outside and to maximise its chances and those of its individual members to gain economic security. All else is secondary. The “traditional” Afghan household with its norms and structures clearly does not carry with it the notion of the pursuit of individual advantage. Nor is it clear, as matters stand, that such a

99 Tapper, *Bartered Brides*.

100 Key informant interview, July 2009.

101 Smith, *Decisions, Desires and Diversity*.

102 A.K. Sen, “Gender and Cooperative Conflicts,” in *Persistent Inequalities: Women and World Development*, ed. I. Tinker, 123-49 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

103 Tapper, *Bartered Brides*.

104 Quoted in A. Whaites, “States in Development: Understanding State Building: A DFID Working Paper,” 8 (London: Department for International Development), <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications/State-in-Development-Wkg-Paper.pdf>.

pursuit would be to its benefit. As Nancy Dupree commented, “as shaky as it is, in some instances, the household is the only stable institution available.”<sup>105</sup> Thus, the effort and cost expended in trying to get married, and the degree of distress caused by a lack of means to get married, are not surprising.

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105 Dupree, “The Family During Crisis in Afghanistan.”

## 7. Conclusions

The picture that emerges from this analysis of livelihood trajectories in three villages in Badakhshan is not a comforting one. For most households, economic conditions are worse than they were before 2001, although between then and now, most experienced a brief period of relative prosperity corresponding to the one available market choice: opium poppy. Many of the poorer households in all three villages rationed food during 2008-09, reducing both quality and quantity in order to survive. These poor households' reports of the disposal of key assets of livestock and even land evidences a decline in their circumstances. Some households, either because of larger asset holdings or good luck (the presence of sufficient male labour, for example), are managing to maintain their positions. In two of the villages, a few have prospered: in agriculturally rich Village B through the scale of their household assets, and in Village A through education and employment.

But the precariousness of survival in this mountain economy is also evident. Household-specific factors such as illness and death and the associated costs can rapidly lead to a decline in fortune; good luck (such as having sons) combined with resourcefulness can lead to prosperity during one life cycle, but then household division can reduce the circumstances of the next generation.

Two questions arise: What is the agricultural future for these rural mountain households? And if, as it can be argued, there is not much of one, why are people still there? The opium poppy economy in many ways can be seen as an aberration, not so much because of its contested legality as because of what it offered: a farm-based economy that could ensure food security and even a degree of prosperity. No other crop will be able to do that. Given the evidence of declining land holdings across generations, climatic risk and the fact that most households secure over 50% of their grain supplies from sources other than their own farms, agriculture will—at best—play a part-time subsistence role. The key issue for the rural economy in the short term is employment, which agriculture cannot provide it at a necessary scale. The danger is that marginal increases in productivity will keep people on the land but keep them poor, thus creating an agricultural poverty trap. So why do people stay and invest scarce resources in marriage to keep themselves there?

This study has argued that the main reason for staying is the relative physical and economic security that the village and household offer, which unavailable elsewhere. Indeed, the acute risk and uncertainty that have characterised the wider environment of Badakhshan have, if anything, deepened that need since 2001. The room for choice or autonomy in such circumstances is limited, but the commitment to the institutions of village and household is unquestionable, although individuals are clearly aware of the costs and compromises associated with them.

There are important differences between villages and households. This paper has used the concept of the “village republic” to point to the variable capacity of villages to provide public goods and the circumstances that have brought this about. It has also argued that it is possible to characterise the long-term behaviours of villages that lead to significant village differences. Such variability is rarely captured, responded to or built on in programming because village practices and authority structures sit uncomfortably with donor views of good governance. But is it not more the case that both the village and the household secure an allegiance, whatever the costs, because they offer what is unavailable elsewhere in Afghanistan's institutional landscape? Rather than seeing the Afghan household and the social norms that structure it as exceptional and problematic in their formation and operation, there are grounds for seeing them as something more usual and necessary, given the circumstances that the focus on state-building and liberal capitalism has lost sight of.

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