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## EYES WIDE SHUT: Counter-Narcotics in Transition

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*Images and mapping by Alcis Ltd, OSDR and Mansfield*

### Executive Summary

It is now clear that the production and trade of opiates will have a significant influence on not only the economic, political and security landscape, but even the physical terrain of post-Transition Afghanistan. Levels of opium poppy cultivation are already rising; estimated cultivated area rose by 18 percent in 2012 and is likely to rise significantly over the next few years. And this trend may intensify further as politico-military actors make deals and form coalitions in response to the 2014 handover of security responsibility from the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

Even while NATO forces remain, the coercive power of the Afghan state has diminished in parts of provinces previously described as “models” for counter-narcotics efforts. In provinces such as Helmand and Nangarhar, there is likely to be a return to widespread opium poppy cultivation in the more accessible and fertile areas as NATO and the ANSF cease to operate outside the areas where the state has a history of control. As security forces withdraw, the state has either relinquished control of such territory to anti-government elements (AGEs), or delegated it to local power brokers who may have little interest in reducing opium poppy cultivation, and may even encourage it.

Further increases in cultivation are also likely as opium poppy returns in greater amounts to some of the provinces previously deemed “poppy free,” such as Ghor, Laghman and even Balkh. Perhaps more worrying is the potential for an expansion of opium into previously uncultivated areas of desert land in the South. The adoption of new technologies—such as deep wells, herbicides and solar power—will likely aid cultivation in these areas, reducing the cost of inputs and increasing productivity. Meanwhile, ill-sequenced and poorly-targeted counter-narcotics and development efforts coupled with a continuing global demand for opiates provide additional incentives for production.

Increasing levels of cultivation have wider implications for the political economy of the country. In an increasingly contested rural space, narcotics and counter-narcotics policies are both likely to be a major source of patronage and division. The Taliban have a history of actively encouraging opium poppy cultivation as part of a strategy to gain the support of the rural population and highlight the weakness of provincial administration. By provoking crop destruction as part of counter-narcotics efforts, this strategy also increases rural antipathy to the state and its international partners. The myriad different local security forces operating under the sometimes loose supervision of Afghan and international military forces are less coherent. In some areas of Kandahar and Helmand the Afghan Local Police (ALP) are pursuing an aggressive counter-narcotics effort, conscious that they may lose their salaries and patronage if they do not. In other parts of these provinces as well as in Balkh, farmers allege that members of the ALP and even the Afghan Border Police either benefit from poppy cultivation or grow it themselves.

As most NATO forces depart and concerns over declining external financial assistance grow, there is a risk that more of these local security forces will look to opium production and trade as a way to build patronage and strengthen their military position against opponents. In an increasingly unpredictable financial environment, armed groups that can control the rents from the production and trade of high value commodities such as opium will gain the upper hand.

Given the potentially damaging impact of opium on Afghanistan's economic, political and security trajectory, the question for the international community and the government should not be whether to engage on the drugs issue post-2014, but how. As things stand, however, an almost wilful short-sightedness on the part of western donors combined with attempts to confine the drugs issue to the policy periphery risk undermining the wider political and development effort in Afghanistan.

The overall environment surrounding Transition presents a sub-optimal environment for cutting opium production. Reduced aid, slower economic growth, an uncertain security trajectory and pervasive rural poverty all pose major challenges. Spiralling production and allegations of drug-related corruption against government officials will play badly in western nations, where taxpayers increasingly question the point of providing significant assistance to Afghanistan amid fiscal crises at home. And without concrete action, even successful development efforts aimed at expanding irrigation and improving road infrastructure may end up aiding the production and trade of opiates.

Despite policy statements to the contrary, there is still a tendency to pursue stand-alone counter-narcotics interventions that do not address the wider causes

of opium production. These efforts have met with limited success, and have in some cases set in motion socio-economic and political processes that have marginalised sections of the population, undermined state formation and ultimately led to the resurgence and relocation of cultivation. By contrast, evidence from Afghanistan and elsewhere suggests that enduring reductions in cultivation are most likely in areas where rural communities can realise broader development goals. These consist not only of improved household risk management through the diversification of on-farm, off-farm and non-farm income, but also the improved provision of public goods to communities in a way that strengthens their social compact with the state. Critically, evidence also suggests that cultivation will shift, adapt and persist in areas where viable alternatives are not in place.

In practice, effective counter-narcotics policy will have to involve the development of synergies between the different sectoral interventions currently being implemented in Afghanistan. This will require both effective area-based planning, and mandatory assessments of how national and bilateral programmes will impact on security, governance and development outcomes—as well as on the drivers of the opium economy and opium poppy cultivation. It will also require greater investment in understanding the multiple realities that exist in rural Afghanistan, and developing more effective methods for assessing the livelihood impacts of different interventions—including on those involved in opium poppy cultivation. Most important of all, there is a need to situate all future analysis and planning in Afghanistan within the context of its expanding drugs economy. A failure to address how this emerging reality will affect both plans for Transition and the country's long-term development and political trajectory would be an act of gross negligence.

## 1. The Elephant in the Room

Policymakers seem to have lost all appetite for talking about the production and trade of opium in Afghanistan. While discussion has thankfully moved past the lengthy communiqués of earlier international conferences on Afghanistan, where issues were laid out like a shopping list<sup>1</sup> with little sense of priority, little has emerged in its

place. Recent declarations make no mention of either the likely increase in drug production in Afghanistan post-2014, or the impact it will have on the political economy of the country. In fact, in western capitals there is almost

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1 “Berlin Declaration” (Berlin: 1 February 2005), para 5, <http://mfa.gov.af/Content/files/berlindeclaration.pdf> (accessed 8 August 2013); “The Afghanistan Compact” (London: 1 February 2006), 4 and 11, <http://mfa.gov.af/Content/files/Afghanistan%20Compact.pdf> (accessed 8 August 2013); “Declaration of the International Conference in Support of Afghanistan” (Paris: 12 June 2008), p. 3, <http://mfa.gov.af/Content/files/english.pdf> (accessed 8 August 2013); “Afghanistan: The London Conference” (London: 28 January 2010), para 27, <http://mfa.gov.af/Content/files/LONDON%20CONFERENCE.pdf> (accessed 8

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August 2013); “Kabul Conference Communiqué” (Kabul: 20 July 2010), para 26, <http://mfa.gov.af/Content/Media/Documents/FINALKabulConferenceCommunique2782011123830501553325325.pdf> (accessed 8 August 2013); “The International Conference in Bonn” (Bonn: 5 December 2011), para 15, <http://mfa.gov.af/Content/files/Second%20Bonn%20Conference%202011%20Communique.pdf> (accessed 8 August 2013); “Chicago Summit Declaration on Afghanistan” (Chicago: 21 May 2012), para 21, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_87595.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87595.htm) (accessed 8 August 2013); “The Tokyo Declaration Partnership for Self-Reliance in Afghanistan From Transition to Transformation” (Tokyo: 9 July 2012), para 6, <http://mfa.gov.af/en/news/11196> (accessed 8 August 2013).

an allergic reaction to the acronym “CN,” with senior policymakers often avoiding the subject entirely.

Even the World Bank—for a long time an active participant in trying to address drugs as a cross cutting issue in national programmes<sup>2</sup>—devotes little attention to the issue in its current published macroeconomic assessments of the country.<sup>3</sup> In its analysis of post-Transition Afghanistan, the World Bank addressed the drugs issue only in passing. While it asserts that “during the Transition opium production may grow temporarily,”<sup>4</sup> it offers no supporting evidence for why this growth will be only temporary and what will reverse this trend.<sup>5</sup>

It is not completely clear why the drugs issue has dropped so completely off the agenda. Perhaps everyone is just too busy with other priorities that fit more naturally under clear institutional mandates. After all, the list of other concerns is substantial: the sustainability and performance of the Afghan National Security Forces; the success of the presidential elections in April 2014; future aid flows; and the potential mechanisms for aid delivery in a context where territorial control is likely to be more limited. It sometimes seems that amid preparations for Transition, there is little space for a conversation about

2 Between 2004 and 2008, the World Bank commissioned a number of pieces of work integrating the drugs issue into both its analysis and programming. This included efforts to “mainstream” drugs into a number of National Priority Programmes. Its work on integrating drugs into development analysis and planning in Afghanistan culminated in a report it published with the UK Department for International Development. See “Afghanistan: Economic Incentives and Development Initiatives to Reduce Opium Production” (Kabul: World Bank/DFID, 2008).

3 This may reflect in part the declining share of opium in Afghanistan’s GDP in recent years, which has fallen from an estimate of 13 percent in 2007 to four percent in 2012 due to the growth in the Afghan economy and a rapid expansion in external assistance over this period. See UNODC, “Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007” (Kabul: UNODC, 2007), 7; UNODC, “Afghanistan Opium Survey” (Kabul: UNODC, 2012), 13.

4 In this report the drugs issue is mentioned only as a “factoid” in a box on page 51, while at the same time acknowledging that “the illicit production of opium still overshadows agriculture, accounting for nearly half of overall agricultural production but on a much smaller portion of agricultural land.” Drugs are not mentioned in sections on rural livelihoods or in the conclusions and recommendations, and are given only a paragraph (apart from the aforementioned box) in the chapter on the economic impacts of Transition, despite separate sections on employment, poverty and economic growth. See World Bank, “Afghanistan in Transition: Looking beyond 2014” (Kabul/Washington, DC: World Bank, 2012). Even in early July 2013, a Bank presentation made to senior officials in Kabul made only a passing reference to the rise in cultivation in 2013, offering no analysis of how growing drugs production would impact on the wider economy and the Bank’s own economic forecasts for the country. See World Bank, “Afghanistan: From Transition to Transformation II” (briefing to senior officials meeting, 2 July 2013).

5 This point is repeated in World Bank “April 2013 Afghanistan Economic Update” (Kabul: World Bank, 2013), 7.

a genuinely “cross-cutting” issue such as drugs, despite its wide-ranging implications.

Or is the drugs issue seen as just too intractable? Despite considerable effort and financial support, Afghanistan still produces 90 percent of the world’s opiates and this is not going to change quickly. It was always to be expected that progress would take time—perhaps more than a generation.<sup>6</sup> However, in a political environment focused on the narrative of a successful Transition marking the end of a successful intervention, there is perhaps the perception that there are just too few good news stories when it comes to drug production. There are certainly few to be found in the media; when cultivation goes down—as it did between 2008 and 2011—the press is hardly interested. However, when levels of cultivation rise (or are predicted to do so), they are accompanied by a multitude of articles predicting “floods” of heroin in western streets, or increased revenues for criminal or insurgent groups in Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup>

In fact, digging beneath the aggregate statistics and looking at specific geographic spaces can yield far more positive stories—for example of the improving quality of life in households and communities that have abandoned opium production in areas close to regional economic hubs and provincial centres. However, these are not the stories that make headlines, and therefore have little influence on policy or operational decisions at the highest levels.

For those in the development community, the challenge of knowing what to do with regard to drug crop production is all the more problematic given the wide and growing disconnect between Kabul and the rest of the country. Addressing challenges in rural Afghanistan—including opium poppy cultivation—requires immersion in the multiple realities that exist in the countryside, understanding complex socio-economic and political processes, and examining the intended and unintended consequences of various interventions across quite different geographic terrains.

However, in the current environment, aside from project monitoring, there is little investment in measuring the impact of development activities on the lives and livelihoods of rural populations. Instead, much of the narrative on counter-narcotics is dominated by simplistic one-dimensional measures, such as United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) aggregate statistics on hectareage and metric tonnes, or data from province- and district-wide household surveys (with all the biases that

6 As previous counter-narcotics experiences in Pakistan and Thailand would seem to suggest.

7 Damian Gayle, (2013) ‘Afghan heroin production soars as foreign troops pull out, says UN’, Mail Online, 15 April 2013.

such polling entails).<sup>8</sup> This lack of detailed information only leaves policymakers all the more disconnected from events in the rural areas where opium poppy is concentrated.

The drugs issue in Afghanistan may also have been effectively downgraded because it is a genuinely “wicked problem”—the outcome of a complex web of interdependent factors and issues evolving over time and responding in new and unforeseen ways to attempts to “solve” it.<sup>9</sup> As such, narrowly defining its causes or simply ignoring aspects that appear too complex or fall under another institution’s budget and mandate will do little to tame it. This is problematic because co-ordination across different government departments or donors is a challenge in itself. Bureaucracies, whether Afghan or western, tend to dislike issues where they do not control all the levers, agree a corresponding budget, and get credited for the results achieved.

A recent quarterly report from the United States Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR)<sup>10</sup> provides a good example of how many actors still see counter-narcotics as a stand-alone issue rather than as an externality of a wider process that delivers development, security and governance outcomes. According to the report, US\$ 82.12 billion of US government funds—92.6 percent of the \$88.76 billion of the US funds obligated to Afghanistan as of 31 December 2012—were spent on security, governance and development. In comparison, only \$6.15 billion were allocated for direct counter-narcotics activities.<sup>11</sup> These numbers highlight the

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8 For example, the Helmand Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (HMEP), which is used to assess performance in Helmand, reports that only 3-5 percent of households answered yes to the questions: “In the past 12 months, did your household make any revenues from each of the following?...Sale of opium/poppy.” See “HMEP Annual Review,” February 2013, 14-2 and 14-4. Even in the more secure Food Zone in which polling might be possible, opium poppy cultivation rose, occupying as much as 62.5 percent of the agricultural land in the part of Nahr-i Seraj contained within the Food Zone (US government data analysed by Alcis). Given the trends in production and prices reported by UNODC and the US government, it is hard to believe that opium poppy cultivation was a source of income for only the five percent of the population that HMEP reports. Beyond the inevitable implications for social desirability bias inherent in such direct lines of enquiry, there are also many parts of Helmand, particularly those areas where the Taliban dominate (including north of the Boghra Canal) where opium poppy is increasingly concentrated. Again, it is difficult to believe that such topics could be pursued at all without threats to the lives of enumerators.

9 Jeff Conklin, “Wicked Problems and Social Complexity” (CogNexus Institute, 2008), <http://www.cs.uml.edu/radical-design/uploads/Main/WickedProblems.pdf> (accessed 8 August 2013).

10 Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, “18th Quarterly Report to the United States Congress” (Arlington, VA: SIGAR, 2012), 89-93.

11 The SIGAR Report cites appropriations of \$51.15 billion

contradictions inherent in the current approach. While the counter-narcotics community is held accountable for a failure to reduce opium production, it has little influence over the security and development sectors—both of which are integral to delivering the conditions required for enduring reductions in cultivation.

Another challenge is that few western policymakers believe that a post-2014 Afghan government will prioritise drug issues. According to this view, any new administration will face more than enough challenges once it is in full control of its own sovereignty. As a consequence, it will not want to pursue a counter-narcotics policy that might alienate the rural population through interventions such as eradication; nor will it want to sanction those involved in the drugs trade, particularly where the individuals or groups concerned are close to state power. Instead, national and provincial government officials may reach some kind of accommodation with local armed groups, allowing them to extract rent from the drugs trade in return for their acquiescence to the state.

However, scepticism over the post-Transition government’s commitment to counter-narcotics is a poor justification for letting it slip from donor agendas—see for example the absence of drugs-related indicators from the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework. It is equally likely that the post-2014 government will be reluctant to address other challenging questions such as human rights, the status of women, democracy, and corruption. Yet this has not stopped donors from continuing to publicly raise these issues—at least until now.

Those who still talk about counter-narcotics with fervour often don’t help. This is in large part due to questions about motivation and about whose interests are being served. In some instances, counter-narcotics advocates appear motivated mainly by a desire to reduce drug consumption at home, despite the fact that supply side reductions have little impact on domestic availability and prices.<sup>12</sup> There are also what are seen by others as the campaigns of fear, where members of the drug control community talk of “bumper crops” and “narco states” as a way of mobilising action without any clear direction for what might be done beyond calls for greater levels of crop destruction.

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for security; \$22.39 billion for governance and development; \$6.15 billion for counter-narcotics; \$2.4 billion for humanitarian aid; and \$6.64 billion for operations and oversight (page 55). The appropriations for counter-narcotics include funds for eradication, the MCN’s Good Performers Initiative, Counter Narcotics Public Information and counter-narcotics reports, as well as money for the Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan and interdiction operations.

12 UK Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit, “Strategy Unit Drugs Report: Phase One—Understanding the Issues” (London: Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit, 2003), <http://www.countthecosts.org/sites/default/files/Strategy%20Unit%20drugs%20report.pdf> (accessed 8 August 2013).

Development organisations on the ground in Afghanistan may also get the impression that the counter-narcotics community wants to go it alone. They perceive the actors involved as content within their “strand” or “lane,” unable or unwilling to see how their interventions impact on other lines of activity, in particular on longer-term development goals. There is also suspicion that, despite the rhetoric about drugs’ cross-cutting nature, performance is still ultimately measured by the amount of crop eradicated each year. It is certainly the case that the political priority given to counter-narcotics efforts in the past has not always been helpful.

Critics have also attacked the development approaches of the main counter-narcotics organisations. UNODC have called for a counter-narcotics National Priority Programme (NPP),<sup>13</sup> while the Ministry of Counter Narcotics (MCN) has focused on the delivery of agricultural inputs—primarily wheat seed and fertiliser—in the form of Food Zone programmes. To many in the development community, both strategies appear to

contradict the idea of drugs as a cross cutting issue and ignore the fact that enduring reductions in cultivation cannot be achieved by single-sector interventions delivered by a single ministry or agency.

Currently, one of the main challenges is the competition of interests among the varied institutions involved in determining whether and how the drugs issue is prioritised after 2014. There are those in the counter-narcotics community who want it front and centre, and those on the political and development side who wish to forget about it altogether. What is missing in this discussion is a realistic analysis of how the drugs issue is likely to play out in Afghanistan over the coming years—how it will affect the complex socio-economic and political processes already shaping the country’s political economy, and the knock-on impact this will have on the policy priorities already established by military, political and development institutions both in Kabul and in various foreign capitals.

## 2. Transition: Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom

The reality that both the government and the international community have to face is this: opium production is not only on the rise, but also likely to accelerate significantly in the coming years. UNODC estimated an 18 percent increase in the amount of opium poppy grown between 2011 and 2012.<sup>14</sup> This latest increase is on top of the seven percent increase in the level of cultivation between 2010 and 2011. Overall, these figures represent an expansion in cultivated area from an estimated 123,000 hectares (ha) in 2009 and 2010 to 154,000 ha in 2012. US government estimates outline an even steeper expansion over the same period, from 115,000 ha in 2011 to 180,000 ha in 2012.

Evidence from the field suggests that opium poppy cultivation will increase further in 2013, and there is little doubt that in the years to come, illicit drug cultivation and trade will play an increasingly significant role in Afghanistan’s political economy. In particular, there are signs that the models of drug control established in Nangarhar, Balkh and Helmand provinces are failing or under stress. Worryingly, there is also growing evidence of backsliding in what were once “poppy free” provinces, with UNODC predicting that only 14 provinces will remain poppy free in 2013 (down from 17 in 2012), with Balkh, Faryab and Takhar possibly exceeding 100

ha of opium poppy cultivation each.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps of even greater concern for those more interested in aggregate statistics is the dramatic increase in the amount of former desert land now under production as a result of technological improvements. As these innovations spread, they are likely to bring even more land under opium poppy cultivation, a trend that could result in Afghanistan producing considerably more opium than it has ever done before. This is especially likely if yields rebound from the extremely low levels experienced in some areas in recent years due to crop disease and other factors.

### Broken Models? Nangarhar, Balkh and Helmand

Over the years, members of both the government and the international community have praised the governors of Nangarhar and Balkh for their efforts in eliminating opium poppy cultivation. In particular, Balkh under Governor Atta Mohammed Noor has achieved “poppy free” status every year since 2007. The counter-narcotics efforts of Governor Gul Agha Shirzai in Nangarhar were also commended for reducing cultivation from an estimated 18,739 ha of opium poppy in 2007 to zero in 2008, and maintaining relatively low levels of cultivation until 2010. More recently the Helmand “Food Zone”—a package of agricultural inputs combined with the threat of eradication implemented under Governor Gulab Mangal—has also been praised for dramatic reductions in the levels of cultivation in

<sup>13</sup> See MCN, “National Alternative Livelihoods Policy” (Kabul: MCN, 2012), 34. Emma Graham Harrison, “Afghanistan: high expectations of record opium crop,” *The Guardian*, 15 April 2013.

<sup>14</sup> UNODC/MCN, “Afghanistan Opium Survey 2012: Summary Findings” (Kabul: UNODC/MCN, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> UNODC/MCN, “Afghanistan Opium Risk Assessment 2013” (Kabul: UNODC/MCN, 2013), 2.

the province's canal command area. This has led to calls for similar initiatives in Badakhshan, Nangarhar, Farah, Uruzgan and Kandahar provinces.

With Transition fast approaching, the sustainability of the successes achieved in these model provinces is under question, and there are growing signs of fragility. In each province, reductions in cultivation in areas nearest the provincial centre—where there is a history of strong state presence and resource endowments are more favourable—are being countered by increases in less permissive environments. In fact, aggregate cultivation is rising in both Nangarhar and Helmand, raising questions over how durable these models will prove to be once NATO forces no longer have a presence in rural areas. Even in Balkh, where NATO forces have not been connected with counter-narcotics activities, there are questions about how the wider shifts in security dynamics could feed into increasing levels of cultivation.

The counter-narcotics models in these provinces claim to treat all farmers equally by banning opium across a wide area or single province. However, this approach inevitably requires far greater coercion in areas where there is no history of state control and where the rural population does not have the resources needed to transition out of opium without incurring significant losses in welfare. Ultimately, attempts to treat all farmers the same have resulted in very different political and economic outcomes. In some areas, they have supported improved development outcomes and sustained reductions in opium poppy cultivation; in others, where there are no viable alternatives and little history of state control, they have undermined state formation and provided new opportunities for AGEs to capture territory.

### Nangarhar: The retreat of the state<sup>16</sup>

It is clear that the drug control model in Nangarhar is collapsing, and that annual cultivation is rising along an increasingly steep trajectory. After achieving “poppy free” status in 2008, cultivation returned slowly in 2009, when only 294 ha of opium poppy were grown. However, by 2012 UNODC estimated that 3,151 ha of land in the province were under opium poppy, and that just short of 4,000 ha of opium poppy were actually planted once the 784 ha of crop reported as destroyed

<sup>16</sup> This section is based on fieldwork undertaken in April 2013, as well as previous rounds of fieldwork in Nangarhar. See David Mansfield, “Between a rock and a hard place: Counter-narcotics efforts and their effects in the 2011-12 growing season” (Kabul: AREU, 2011); David Mansfield, “All Bets are off! Prospects for (B)reaching agreements and drug control in Helmand and Nangarhar in the run up to transition” (Kabul: AREU, 2013).

were also taken into account.<sup>17</sup> The US government estimated a higher level of cultivation, with as much as 4,400 ha of land under opium poppy in 2012 (excluding the amount eradicated in the spring).

Those holding on to the notion of Nangarhar as a successful model of drug control emphasise that current levels of cultivation remain well below the 15,000 to 20,000 ha height of the 1990s, and that production remains concentrated in the southern districts bordering Pakistan. However, while cultivation had previously remained geographically limited, by 2013 it not only became firmly entrenched in the upper valleys of the Spinghar foothills, but also moved further down the valleys and is now located much closer to Jalalabad.

In fact, recent fieldwork suggests that opium poppy occupied almost all of the land under cultivation in the upper valleys of Khogiani and Achin in the 2012/13 growing season. By contrast, there were only a few fields of clover for animal feed and almost no wheat crop at all (see Figure 1). Further down the valley near the district centres of Kahi and Kargha, opium poppy cultivation dropped off, but still occupied as much as half of the cultivable land in some areas. Even in the lower parts of these districts, it still occupied 20-30 percent of cultivable land. There are now even signs of small amounts of cultivation in Fatehabad, bordering Khogiani, and in the area running alongside the Tor Ghar mountains in Surkhrud, as well as in Syachob in Upper Shinwar. Cultivation has also increased significantly in Chapahar, close to the main road running through the district. There is also evidence that the crop is re-establishing itself more firmly in all of these areas. Confidence that the crop is here to stay has prompted the return of *salaam* (a system of advance payments on future crops) for the first time since 2007. In Shadal opium is again being bought and sold openly in the bazaar.<sup>18</sup>

There are also few indications that the government has the coercive power necessary to eradicate the crop in the upper districts of Nangarhar. In fact, the

<sup>17</sup> UNODC/MCN 2012, 10. The 2011 Survey also points out: “It is worth noting that while every effort is made to ensure that all areas in which poppy is grown are covered by satellite imagery, it is only in the provinces of Badghis, Dai Kundi, Farah, Helmand, Kandahar, Nimroz, Uruzgan and Zabul where imagery collection is based on a representative sample and confidence intervals are calculated for the level of cultivation.” In the 26 ‘target’ provinces, including Nangarhar, Balkh and Badakhshan, “the approach assumes that all areas were identified and covered by imagery,” and therefore “area estimates should be considered as a minimum estimate.” See UNODC/MCN, “Afghanistan Opium Survey 2011” (Kabul: UNODC/MCN, 2011), 92.

<sup>18</sup> Although it is interesting to note that, as in the 1990s, the Taliban have adopted a more punitive position on cannabis; trade in hashish is prohibited and has to be conducted by farmers “in secret” (although cultivation is plainly visible).

Figure 1: Extensive opium poppy cultivation, Upper Achin, Nangarhar, April 2013



population in areas of Upper Achin has significantly increased the amount of land allocated to opium poppy in 2013 and does not appear to fear losing its crop to an eradication campaign. Even in the lower parts of Achin bordering the district of Shinwar, there has been only limited eradication despite official reports of crop destruction. In other districts such as Kot, official reports of eradication are overstated. Moreover, there are signs of a negotiated process whereby some farmers forego some of their crop and are compensated by fellow villagers. In the words of one district official, “I am skilled in destroying a little while making it look like a lot.” While there are some reports of outright corruption and payments made to avoid eradication, in most cases local officials appear to be seeking the assistance of rural communities in concealing the state’s weakness from the provincial, national and international actors who monitor levels of drug crop cultivation (see Figure 2).

Khogiani District offers a good example of the multiple and competing objectives that the state has tried to balance this growing season. There, the government was unwilling to incur or inflict the kind of casualties that occurred during the eradication season in April 2012, when 45 were killed and 36 were injured. More importantly, the ANSF were unwilling to lose the gains they made in three counterinsurgency operations conducted during the winter of 2012/13. In fact, many rural communities were under the impression that the ANA commander who led these operations had himself announced to district elders that their opium crop would not be destroyed this year.

Governor Shirzai’s recent actions in this regard have also signalled his weakness to the rural population. No

longer able or willing to travel to the district centres to impose a ban as he did in the 2007/08 and 2008/09 growing seasons, he reportedly wrote to district officials asking them to eradicate the crop. Overall, it appears that the governor has far more pressing problems in Jalalabad—where he is facing down challenges to both his leadership and business interests from old *mujahidin* elites and their offspring—to concern himself with events in rural Nangarhar. Aware of the limits of the government’s territorial control and the late stage in the season, the district governor of Khogiani has looked to negotiate an agreed amount of eradication for each *manteqa* (geographical area). However, elders and communities rejected these overtures and the harvest started in the third week of April 2013. Reports from the ground suggest farmers were not even willing to sacrifice their weakest crops “just for photos for the foreigners,” even with offers of compensation from their neighbours. Many farmers believed the provincial authorities had been allocated \$300 million for crop destruction by “the foreigners,” but had “kept it for themselves.”

Efforts to destroy the opium crop in Nangarhar this year have also been hampered by the fact that it is an excellent crop, with capsule sizes that occur only a few times in a decade. Moreover, rural households in the Spinghar foothills are in urgent need of the economic stimulus the crop will bring. The area has small landholdings, high population densities and has cultivated no poppy since 2007. On top of this, its population has experienced a significant increase in the cost of food items and agricultural inputs, ongoing reductions in the flow of aid, and a recent slump in Jalalabad’s urban economy.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> In April 2013, labourers in Jalalabad reported that although wage labour rates had continued to rise over the last 12 months, increasing from PR 450 PR to PR 500 PR per day (or from \$4.40

*Figure 2: Results of eradication campaign in Marouf Chinar, Lower Achin, Nangarhar, April 2013*



Overall, farmers believe that this is the right crop at the right time and that it is well worth fighting for. The government knows this and is looking for the best way to give the impression of acting against the crop without provoking widespread dissent.

But what does all this mean for Nangarhar in 2014, and, given the province's location as the main trade route with Pakistan, what effect will this have on Kabul? How will the government's inability to act against the opium crop this year play out as the withdrawal of US forces reaches its climax and the Afghan presidential elections draw near? As with most topics in Afghanistan, it is hard to offer firm predictions on the future of Nangarhar, particularly given the prevailing levels of insecurity and the divisions within its political elite. One thing that does seem clear is that unless the current crisis in the political leadership of the province is resolved, opium poppy cultivation will continue to rise, potentially returning to the high levels of the 1990s. If the political deadlock continues to worsen, there is also a strong possibility that the crop will return to the lower, more accessible parts of the province, including the canal command area where the bulk of agricultural land is located. The sight of opium poppy growing next to

the main highway once more would speak volumes to the population about the strength of the Afghan state.

### **Balkh: On the edge?**<sup>20</sup>

There are also a number of hairline cracks appearing in the veneer in Balkh, further underlining the challenges of applying province-wide counter-narcotics models. The counter-narcotics efforts of the provincial administration have appeared steadfast since the implementation of an effective ban in 2007, and in 2012 UNODC once again designated the province "poppy free." However, as a provincial official admitted during research in 2012, "the province will be poppy free but not as poppy free as it was last year."

With limited satellite monitoring of the province by UNODC<sup>21</sup> and the US government's Crime and Narcotics Center's estimates of 640 ha of opium poppy cultivation there during 2012, the status of eradication remains somewhat murky. Last year there were reports of an abortive eradication campaign in early May, which was abandoned in the initial stages of the campaign after an IED (improvised explosive device) detonated in a field during ploughing. This year, the campaign appeared to

to \$4.90), there were significantly fewer days available and a larger number of prospective workers in the marketplace each day competing for work. They also complained that real wages had fallen due to the rising cost of food items. This is supported by the World Food Programme, which estimated that the daily wage for unskilled work would purchase 35 percent less wheat flour in March 2013 than it did during the same month in 2012. See World Food Programme, "Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping—Afghanistan: Initial market Price Bulletin for the Month of March 2013" (Kabul: WFP, 2013), <http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp256835.pdf> (accessed 8 August 2013).

20 This section is based on fieldwork undertaken in April 2013, as well as previous rounds of fieldwork in Balkh. See Paul Fishstein, "A Little Bit Poppy-free and a Little Bit Eradicated: Opium poppy cultivation in Balkh and Badakhshan provinces in 2011-12" (Kabul: AREU, 2013).

21 The UNODC/MCN Afghanistan Opium Survey 2011 offers a map of the satellite imagery for the area covered in Balkh during the 200/11 growing season. This map shows only a small area of coverage in Chimtal District. See "Afghanistan Opium Survey 2011.", 85. The 2012 Survey indicates that there was no satellite imagery for Balkh during the 2011/12 growing season. See "Afghanistan Opium Survey 2012," 74.



be more serious, with three different phases taking place over a roughly two-month period. In the last phase, tractors were deployed and the eradication force seemed to have stayed in the field around ten days—longer than last year. The more muscular campaign may represent an implicit acknowledgement of expanded cultivation and a renewed determination to suppress it. However, questions remain about the timing of the eradication and whether it was limited to the areas around the road.

Reported cultivation in the province continues to be associated with insecurity, and is concentrated largely in the insecure parts of Chimtal and Char Bolak districts. Security has improved in a number of areas in those districts, attributed largely to the deployment of the ALP. The areas to the west, however, are still largely no-go areas for the government. Dominated by Taliban and Hezb-i Islami, they provide a conducive setting for opium poppy cultivation. The security situation also appears to have improved in the former growing area of Balkh District, where farmers have reported benefiting from new roads. Coupled with the lower costs and greater flexibility provided by the widespread diffusion of the *zaranj* (a three-wheel motorbike that can be fitted with a variety of bodies and trailers to transport goods and people), this improved infrastructure has allowed farmers to transport expanding vegetable production to urban markets in Mazar. Regardless of the area cultivated, it appears that opium output will increase compared to last year, when hail destroyed a significant portion of the crop. Severe floods this spring in other parts of the province did not affect Chimtal and Balkh, and agricultural output in general is projected to be better than last year.

The future of poppy cultivation in the province is also linked to the performance of the wider economy, which faces an uncertain future in the context of both the 2014 Transition and other regional political factors. During spring of 2013, there was reportedly much less construction work available in Mazar-i-Sharif, and at lower wage rates. Such work is critical in providing livelihood opportunities for both the population of districts around the city and in more rural areas of the province. The reduction in construction activities takes place in the context of increasing uncertainty about the post-2014 environment—much local capital has been moved offshore and many activities placed “on hold.” There is also a reported decline in labour migration to Iran due to increasing Iranian restrictions on Afghans as well as the severely reduced value of the *rial*.<sup>22</sup> Both of these factors have reduced the volume of remittances flowing to many households in the province.

22 This has devalued by roughly one-third since January 2009, largely due to Western economic sanctions. See Paul Fishstein, “Balkh’s Economy in Transition” (Kabul: AREU, 2013).

While the ALP is credited with improving security in parts of Chimtal and Char Bolak, questions remain about its longer-term influence. Given the fluid and opportunistic histories of many of the ALP commanders, much of the population has been ambivalent about their role, and concerns have been raised about both their loyalty and their commitment to the counter-narcotics agenda.<sup>23</sup> As elsewhere, there have been allegations of extraction of payments from poppy farmers, and even of direct cultivation. As one observer noted, “they do security. Poppy eradication is not in their job description.” Security in the province may also be affected by the worsening environment in parts of neighbouring Faryab, Jawzjan, and Sar-i-Pul provinces.

### Helmand: As much as it can absorb?<sup>24</sup>

Cultivation in Helmand has also been on the rise. UNODC reported a 19 percent increase in the level of cultivation between 2011 and 2012; US government estimates were much higher, indicating a 47 percent rise.<sup>25</sup> Even within the Food Zone itself there have also been increases, with the US government reporting an expansion of cultivation from 26,632 ha in 2011 to 32,299 ha in 2012, a rise of 21 percent.<sup>26</sup> While UNODC reported much lower levels of cultivation in the Food Zone in 2012 (at only 20,241 ha),<sup>27</sup> their 2013 assessment projected that cultivation would expand in the 2012/13 growing season due to high prices and in compensation for low yields from the harvest in April/May 2012.<sup>28</sup>

It is difficult to offer a prognosis on the level of cultivation in Helmand in 2013. Fieldwork during the planting season in central Helmand revealed farmers’ clear intent to

23 For example, the ALP in Alburz reportedly took their government-provided weapons and went into opposition.

24 This section is based on fieldwork undertaken in April 2013, as well as previous rounds of fieldwork in Helmand. See David Mansfield, “Between a rock and a hard place: Counter-narcotics efforts and their effects in the 2011-12 growing season” (Kabul: AREU, 2011); David Mansfield, “All Bets are off! Prospects for (B)reaching agreements and drug control in Helmand and Nangarhar in the run up to transition” (Kabul: AREU, 2013).

25 UNODC reported that opium poppy cultivation in Helmand increased from 63,307 ha to 75,176 ha, while the US government estimated that cultivation rose from 61,500 ha to 90,500 ha over the same period.

26 Cultivation is still well below the amount in the Food Zone in 2009 and 2010, when the US government estimated 45,917 ha and 40,972 ha respectively.

27 The Executive Director’s Preface states: “less poppy was cultivated within the confines of the Hilmand ‘Food Zone’, where agricultural support programmes are implemented.” At the same time, UNODC only offer an estimate for the scale of cultivation within the Food Zone during 2012. See MCN/UNODC 2012: page 13).

28 UNODC/MCN, “Afghanistan Opium Risk Assessment 2013” (Kabul: UNODC/MCN, 2013), 1.

return to cultivation in parts of western Nad-i Ali and Marjah, as well as in research sites around Gereshk in Nahr-i Seraj District. However, fieldwork in April/May 2013 revealed that local security forces in Marjah and Nad-i Ali had subsequently pressed many farmers to destroy their own crop. The ALP played a prominent role in this process, since they were fearful of losing their jobs—and the accompanying patronage benefits—should opium poppy be found in their area.

While cultivation persisted and increased in the district of Nahr-i Seraj, particularly in Malgir and Sra Qala near Gereshk, it remained confined to more remote and insecure territory; in the Food Zone districts of Marjah, Nad-i Ali, Lashkar Gah and Nawa Barakai, it only took place within the privacy of farmers' compound walls. There were even lower levels of cultivation reported in the former desert land north of the Boghra Canal among those farmers with landholdings of ten *jeribs* (around two ha) or more. Prompted by fears that 2012's crop failure might happen again, as well as by lower opium prices in the run up to the 2012/13 planting season, these households were more reluctant to mono-crop opium in the 2012/13 growing season. Instead, they returned to a mixed farming system that included an amount of wheat for household consumption, as well as some poppy.

Overall, the 2008 ban on opium poppy cultivation has helped set in motion a number of socio-economic and political processes that may make sustaining the reductions achieved inside the Food Zone increasingly difficult. These include migration to former desert areas, reduced access to land and increased homelessness among the land-poor, distress sales of livestock, and mono-cropping of opium poppy in the former desert areas.

As in Nangarhar and Balkh, it is possible to see visible signs of progress in the areas of economic growth around the provincial centre. Here, the combination of good security, public service provision, and improved economic opportunities in the agricultural sector—most importantly in non-farm activities—have driven improvements in farmers' overall wellbeing. This in turn gives them a reason for continued engagement with the state.

Moving away from the provincial centre, however, there is little evidence of crop and income diversification. A growing anger toward the government is also developing in areas where a better security situation has brought with it a ban on opium production, but little improvement in economic opportunities. Within the Food Zone, the reduction in the level of opium poppy cultivation has also left the land-poor especially vulnerable. When opium poppy was grown more widely,

these households typically sharecropped land in the Food Zone, receiving between one-third and one-half of the opium crop depending on the particular arrangement made with the landowner. Sharecroppers also received a house as part of the arrangement and would have access to financial support—albeit at potentially exploitative rates—through loans in cash or in *salaam* payments on their opium crop.

When planning what crops to plant, the priority for many households in the canal command area would be to allocate enough land to wheat to ensure their own food security. Those with livestock would then allocate a small amount of land (no more than one *jerib*, or one-fifth of a ha) to alfalfa, which would provide feed when combined with wheat straw. Livestock could not only be sold, but would also provide both meat (particularly *landi*<sup>29</sup>) and dairy products for household consumption. The rest of the land might then be cultivated with opium poppy, which could ultimately account for between 40 and 60 percent of total household agricultural land during the winter season. In summer, households would then switch to cultivating a combination of maize, mung bean, cotton, melon and watermelon.

In the absence of opium poppy, however, the land-poor in the canal area have experienced a significant loss of wellbeing, mainly because they are now unable to acquire land to cultivate. Also, the crops that have typically replaced opium poppy in much of Nad-i Ali and Marjah have been significantly less labour intensive. This has allowed landowners to manage their own land without a need for sharecroppers. Since the imposition of the opium ban, the land-poor have therefore found it much harder to find land and a house in the more productive canal command area. Moreover, due to their reduced negotiating power, those who have been able to find land now receive a lower share of the crops that they cultivate. Sharecroppers have been compelled to work larger farms, typically of around 15 *jeribs* (three ha), to make ends meet. This has in turn further reduced the amount of land available for other land-poor households looking for sharecropping arrangements.

Receiving only a one-fifth share of low value crops such as cotton, maize and mung bean has led land-poor households to reduce the quality and quantity of food they consume, delay health care expenditure even for serious illnesses, and sell off long term productive assets including livestock. Losing access to *landi* and dairy products due to the sale of sheep and cattle results in significant additional welfare losses. Meeting the cost

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29 *Landi* is a type of dried lamb meat, consumed largely during the winter months.

of social obligations such as funerals and marriage<sup>30</sup> can only be achieved by incurring considerable debt, which cannot be paid without a return to opium poppy cultivation. Those who do not own land are also the least likely to receive any development assistance, particularly the types of agricultural inputs—seed, fertiliser, polytunnels and water pumps—aimed at helping farmers adjust to the opium ban.

However, the land-poor are not the only group under duress. In many parts of Marjah and Nad-i Ali, farmers have continued to grow lower-value crops such as wheat, maize, cotton and mung bean despite falling prices. This highlights the absence of markets for higher value production in these areas. While each of these crops offers low returns, they also represent a low risk combination and can be used to meet households' own needs. For instance, wheat/wheat straw and maize can be consumed both by the household and by livestock. Each crop can also be stored should prices rise or markets fail. Cotton offers a further advantage in that the woody plant provides household fuel for cooking, a function that opium poppy straw used to play when it was more widely cultivated.

At the same time, those with access to land who have abandoned opium poppy and taken up this cropping combination have experienced a further loss of income due to the fall in the farmgate prices of cotton, maize,

and mung bean between 2012 and 2013. This drop is itself largely a result of the growing numbers of farmers cultivating these crops as a response to the opium ban.<sup>31</sup> (See Table 1.) Farmers are particularly angry about what they see as a dramatic fall in the price of cotton, which was down to 190-220 Pakistani Rupees (PKR)/*man* in November 2012<sup>32</sup> compared with 350-420 PKR/*man* in November 2011.<sup>33</sup> They blame the government-run cotton gin in Lashkar Gah, accusing its management of incompetence and corruption. The only households weathering the storm in areas of the Food Zone where crop diversification has not taken place are those with some combination of non-farm income, opium stocks, or particularly large landholdings (over 15 *jeribs* or three ha)—even better if they have all three.

As discussed in Section 3 below, one of households' primary responses to the loss of income accompanying the opium ban in the Food Zone has been to relocate to the former desert area north of the Boghra Canal. This migration flow is adding to a growing population there that is heavily dependent on opium poppy for its livelihood. Initially taken by local commanders linked to the administration of Governor Sher Mohammed Akhundzada (2002-2005), this land has subsequently been gifted to sub-commanders and then sold on to farmers at prices significantly lower than those in the canal command area.

*Table 1: Gross Income on 15 jeribs of Land*

	Land Area ( <i>jeribs</i> )	Yield	Price (PKR)	Landowner Income (PKR)	Tenant Income (PKR) <sup>1</sup>	Sharecropper Income (PKR) <sup>2</sup>
Wheat	8	190	150	228,000	156,000	45,600
Alfalfa	1	N/A	N/A	0	0	0
Cotton	6	170	220	224,400	224,400	44,880
Maize	4	180	105	75,600	75,600	15,120
Mung bean	4	160	260	166,400	166,400	33,280
<b>Total Gross Income<sup>3</sup></b>				<b>694,400</b>	<b>622,400</b>	<b>138,880</b>
<b>Total Gross Income/Person/Day<sup>4</sup></b>				<b>190.25</b>	<b>170.52</b>	<b>38.05</b>

1 Tenant farmers in Marjah typically paid 60-70 *man* of wheat per *jerib* in the 2012/13 growing season.

2 Sharecropper receives one-fifth of the final crop.

3 These data are simplified for illustrative purposes. In reality, farmers would look to retain sufficient wheat, maize and mung bean for family consumption, make contributions to the mullah (around three percent of the total crop), and keep some crop for seed for the subsequent season. It is also important to note that very few farmers in the canal command area would cultivate as much as 15 *jeribs* of land.

4 This assumes a household of ten members, of which typically two to three will be fully working members.

30 Bride prices in central Helmand typically range from PR 500,000 to 900,000 (\$4,890 to \$8,800). The cost of the actual wedding might add a further PR 200,000 to 300,000 (\$1,955 to \$2,930) and there are further costs to meet in terms of clothes for the bride and groom and other gifts. Key informants report that there has been an increasing incidence of couples eloping in the last two to three years as a consequence of families being unable to meet the costs of marriage.

31 Mung bean has fallen from a price of PR 290-350/*man* in 2011 to PR 280-330/*man* in 2012 (or from \$2.80-\$3.40 to \$2.70-\$3.20); maize has fallen from PR 100-120 /*man* in 2011 to PR 70-75 PR/*man* in 2012 (\$1.00-\$1.20 to \$0.70-0.75).

32 In November 2012 there were 95 PKR to 1 USD.

33 In November 2011 there were 85.5 PKR to 1 USD.

High opium prices in 2010 allowed farmers in this area with landholdings over ten *jeribs* (two ha) to accumulate capital, and gave others a viable livelihood and a reprieve from the loss of land, income, and welfare they had experienced in the canal command area. However, farmers now report a second consecutive year of falling opium yields, which they blame on “the Americans spraying the crop.” With crop yield apparently as low as half a *man* (2.25 kg) to three quarters of *man* (3.275 kg) per *jerib*, farmers owning or renting land reported that they were barely meeting their production costs. Sharecroppers claimed they were left with as little as 1.25 *man* and a maximum of 2.5 *man* after mono-cropping ten *jeribs* (two ha) of land with opium poppy. Those working during the harvest received yields of only one *charak* (the equivalent of 1.125 kg) of opium—half the expected amount in a normal year. Many claimed they had earned between 6,000 PKR (USD 61)<sup>34</sup> and 15,000 PKR (USD 163) for a period of 15-18 days’ work, compared to 25,000 PKR (USD 294) in 2011.

Sharecroppers in the area now find themselves in a particularly difficult position, especially the more marginal ones who cannot afford to contribute to the costs of production and can therefore negotiate only one-quarter of the final yield. The usual indicators of economic distress are already evident, with households reducing the quantity and quality of food they consume in response to a fall in their incomes. The food security of this section of the population is all the more tenuous given the fact that most sharecroppers in the area do not cultivate any wheat and are entirely dependent on the cash income from the sale of opium to feed their family. Many are already talking of moving.

The question is, where can these people go? With opium poppy banned in the canal command area, there are precious few landowners who need agricultural workers and who can offer the land and houses that the land-poor are looking for. Moreover, even sharecroppers and tenant farmers within the Food Zone in former desert areas irrigated by tubewell (such as Dasht-i Basharan, Dasht-i Aynak and Dasht-i Shersherak) are looking for more productive land. Having experienced a significant shortfall in income since the imposition of the opium ban, they are among the most virulently opposed to the government.

As opposed to those sharecropping land, most of the former land-poor who now own land in the desert north of the Boghra Canal show no signs of moving. After all, it is their home, and they appear prepared to ride things out by continuing to grow opium poppy despite the low yields. Where they have more land than they can manage, they hope that either their existing sharecroppers will stay, or

that new migrants will appear who are willing to take a chance given the lack of viable alternatives elsewhere.

Ultimately, it is questionable whether the legal economy of Helmand can absorb a simultaneous reduction in the amount of development assistance and low levels of opium production. As in other urban centres in Afghanistan, real wage labour rates in Lashkar Gah are already falling and those looking for work complain that there is a reduction in the number of days available. The inventory of households with surplus opium is also dwindling after the successful imposition of ban for four consecutive seasons in some parts of central Helmand. Some who had capital spent it wisely on cultivating various off-farm sources of income: some purchased a car, renting it out as a taxi; others bought a tractor and ploughed fields for others during peak periods in the agricultural season; others procured a shop and traded anything from agricultural inputs and goods to consumables; and others acquired a *zaranj* and moved crops from the farm to market.

But without the multiplier effects of opium poppy and development spending by the international community, what will happen to the population’s disposable income? For example, with a downturn in international assistance, where will the economic stimulus needed to support the expansion of the legal economy in the wake of the opium ban come from? Who will be able to afford to rent taxis or tractors when there are fewer wage labour opportunities and lower levels of investment in the legal economy? What sector will replace the construction industry<sup>35</sup> as a source of wage labour opportunities for rural households?

In the face of strong economic pressures to return to poppy, the trajectory of cultivation in the canal command area of Helmand will largely depend on the coercive power of the state, and especially on the actions of its delegated representatives, the ALP. There are already signs of the fragility of the political settlement enforcing the opium ban, particularly in areas where few viable alternatives exist and even greater coercion is required to secure compliance (see Section 4). There are also questions over what aid can be delivered in the current political context that will support the expansion of the legal economy and increase economic opportunities for socioeconomic groups who have borne the brunt of the opium ban. Given these pressures, a resurgence of opium poppy cultivation in parts of the canal command area of Helmand seems almost inevitable.

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35 The World Bank reports that construction and services account for 64 percent of the working population in urban centres but only 24 percent in rural areas. See “Afghanistan in Transition,” 65. However, fieldwork in rural Nangarhar and Helmand highlights the important contribution non-farm income, in particular wage labour opportunities in the construction sector and enlistment in the ANSF, have made to the household economy in the absence of opium poppy cultivation.

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34 In May 2013 there were 99 PKR to 1 USD.

### 3. Turning Deserts into Flowers

In recent years, UNODC and the US government have charted dramatic expansions in the area of cultivated land in the South, mainly in Helmand and Farah. In both provinces the primary reason for this has been the increase in the amount of former desert land brought under cultivation. In Helmand, the amount of agricultural land in the former desert area north of the Boghra Canal has increased an astounding 46-fold, from 752 ha in 2002 to 34,270 ha in 2012. Opium poppy cultivation in this area has risen 113 percent, from 16,036 ha in 2008 when the Food Zone initiative began. In the largely desert area of Bakwah in Farah, there has also been a significant increase in the amount of land under opium poppy, rising from 3,570 ha in 2009 to 5,822 ha in 2012. In Delaram in Nimroz,<sup>36</sup> cultivation almost tripled over the same period from 3,011 ha to 8,899 ha.<sup>37</sup> New farmland is also appearing across the southern part of Nawzad in Helmand. The vast majority of all of this land was not even under cultivation in 2005 (see Figure 3).

As noted above, research in Helmand conducted since May 2008 documents an increasing number of farmers relocating from the better irrigated Food Zone to the desert area north of the Boghra Canal. Most of these are land-poor households who were previously growing poppy in the Food Zone, but found fewer opportunities to sharecrop or rent land due to the 2008 ban on opium and subsequent inflow of international military forces during the surge in 2010 and 2011. The landless are further disadvantaged in that they are often not entitled to—and are the least likely to receive—the agricultural inputs distributed by the government as part of the Food Zone initiative.

On arriving in the desert north of the Boghra Canal, these farmers cleared and levelled the land, sunk deep wells and cultivated opium poppy. Some of these farmers purchased the land from provincial political elites, who had initially grabbed large parts of the desert and distributed it amongst their patronage network during the administration of Governor Akhundzada.<sup>38</sup> Other farmers relocated from the Food Zone to the desert as sharecroppers or tenants, cultivating opium for others in the hope that this would eventually earn them enough to afford their own parcel of land. Initial reports from

Bakwah suggest a similar process of land accumulation at work in Farah; local farmers talk of the area north of the Boghra Canal stretching through Delaram to Bakwah as “all one desert.”<sup>39</sup>

Prior to their arrival in the desert, many farmers sharecropped around ten *jeribs* (two ha) of land in the canal command area of Helmand, allocating between four and six *jeribs* (0.8 to 1.4 ha) of land to opium poppy depending on security and the terms of trade between wheat and opium. Following relocation, they have continued to farm the same area of land, but have instead given all ten *jeribs* over to opium. This shift to mono-cropping over the last two years is of growing concern as cultivation intensifies in the area. This encroachment into desert land is also taking place in Spin Boldak and to the north of Highway 1 in Zahre and Maiwand in Kandahar, as well as in Gulistan in Farah. Opium poppy is increasingly concentrated in these areas; with farmers looking for ways to pay for the high fixed and recurrent costs of establishing the diesel-powered tubewells needed to irrigate the land, there is little sign that this process will abate anytime soon.

Unsurprisingly, the experience of migration from the Food Zone, low yields during the harvest in 2012 and 2013 (blamed on the Americans) and recent attempts by the ALP to seize and destroy tubewells have made the population north of the Boghra Canal some of the fiercest critics of the provincial authorities. This is evident in their profanity-filled descriptions of Governor Mangal, his successor Naeem Baloch, international military forces, and their combined efforts to curb poppy cultivation in the province.

These increases in the cultivation of desert land would not have been possible without recent improvements in agricultural practice and access to improved technology. For millennia, opium poppy has been grown in a wide range of agro-ecological conditions in various countries across the globe. With the exception of Europe and Australia, where farmers have adopted more capital-intensive farming techniques such as increased mechanisation and improved varieties of opium poppy, the agricultural techniques involved in growing opium poppy have remained relatively constant. It remains a labour-intensive crop with yields that vary considerably depending on climate, soil conditions, water availability, and the skills of those harvesting the crop.

However, opium poppy husbandry in Afghanistan has experienced advances over the past three decades,

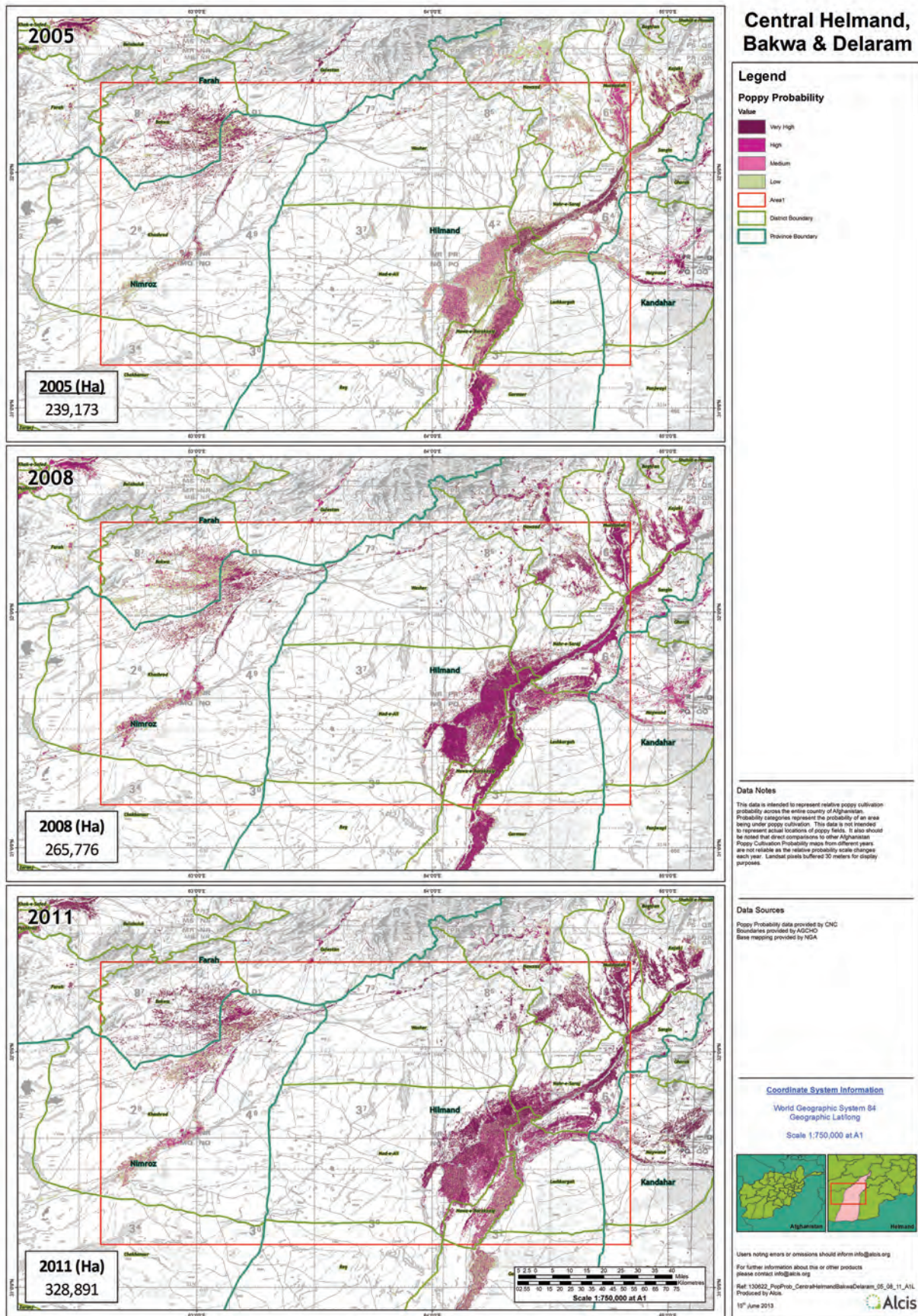
36 UNODC list the district of Delaram in Farah. See “Afghanistan Opium Poppy Survey 2012,” 94. The district and provincial boundaries as recognised by the government now locate Delaram in Nimroz.

37 “Afghanistan Opium Poppy Survey 2012.”

38 For details of the different waves of migration that have occurred in this area see Mansfield, “Between a rock and a hard place.”

39 Fieldwork in Shna Jama, November/December 2012.

Figure 3: Expansion in agricultural land and shifting patterns of opium poppy cultivation in Helmand, Nimroz and Farah, 2005, 2008 and 2011



drawing on the improved technology and inputs that have supported wider agricultural development in the country. For example, in the heavy soils of the former desert areas of Marjah and Nad-i Ali, tractors helped prepare the land for opium poppy in the 1980s, as they did for wheat in the 1960s. The widespread use of chemical fertilisers has also supported increased yields for opium as they did for grains and vegetable crops. In the late 1990s, increasing numbers of shallow wells appeared—largely financed by opium poppy cultivation—as farmers tapped into groundwater in attempts to save their orchards from one of the worst droughts in recent history.

There have also been improvements in agricultural techniques specific to opium poppy cultivation over the last two decades. For example, in the 1990s farmers began using improved tools to lance their crop, as well as experimenting with different varieties of poppy obtained from neighbouring provinces or other parts of the country. Varieties such as “Hindi,” the purple flower seen so often in the fields of Badakhshan in the 1980s and 1990s, have all but disappeared in the 21st century. In their place now grows the better yielding red and white flower of the variety known locally as “Jalalabadi.”

However, the last decade has experienced a more rapid rate of development in agricultural techniques for opium production. There are now growing reports of farmers in Helmand using herbicides to reduce the labour inputs into their opium crop. In particular, the use of products such as Paraquat and “Topic” has reduced the time required for weeding by between one-quarter and one-third.<sup>40</sup> This is notable in part because it is usually assumed that most rural households have surplus labour which can be put to work for agricultural activities such as weeding and thinning. In addition, the substitution of chemicals for hired labour in households with large landholdings may imply that the relative costs of labour are greater than those of chemicals. In any case, these developments may present significant implications for rural labour markets.

More importantly, as noted above, shallow wells are increasingly being replaced by deeper ones as Pakistani and Chinese generators and water pumps have become more affordable. As discussed above, the adoption of this new technology has allowed farmers to encroach into desert land and bring more of it under cultivation. Opium production has facilitated this process by providing the capital needed to fund the purchase of land, the establishment of tubewells and the high recurrent costs of production. This could have implications for both the

<sup>40</sup> Farmers cover the plants they wish to keep with straw or sand for protection and then spray the field. The field is then left for ten days before being irrigated. Once irrigated, the sand or wheat straw is washed away and the farmer undertakes a less intensive weeding than would have otherwise been required, removing the dead crops and aerating the soil. Application rates are 0.5 litres per *jerib*.

level of opium poppy cultivation as well as longer-term water availability.

However, the real game changer could be the introduction of affordable solar power. Over the last few years, the price of solar panels has dropped dramatically thanks to increasing mass production in China.<sup>41</sup> To date, the high cost of diesel has limited the amount of desert land a farmer can bring under agricultural production. For example, research shows that some landowners in the area north of Boghra Canal still own large areas of desert land that is left fallow, or is only cleared and prepared for sale to new migrants. Some landowners who cannot afford to bring this fallow land under cultivation themselves may lease their land to tenant farmers at low rates, on the understanding that tenants meet the full costs of production. Low yields experienced during the opium harvest in 2012 have further restricted opportunities for cultivating new land. Crop failure led some farmers to default on payments for diesel purchased on credit during the 2011/12 growing season, making diesel suppliers more reticent about providing fuel during the planting season in November/December 2012.

With a one-off payment for increasingly affordable solar panels, however, a farmer can avoid the high recurrent costs of diesel, powering the generator needed for a tubewell for many seasons to come. This would remove one of the main barriers to bringing more land under cultivation and extending opium poppy cultivation across the desert areas of the country. One farmer in Badurzai in Spin Boldak reported paying 1.25m PKR (USD12,200) to install a solar-powered tubewell. Prior to this, he had six *jeribs* (1.2 ha) of former desert land under cultivation, with recurrent costs of 180,000 PR (USD 1,757) per year for maintenance and diesel.<sup>42</sup> However, by the 2012/13 growing season he was cultivating 15 *jeribs* (three ha) of land. Although more panels can now be seen in Spin Boldak in Kandahar and north of the Boghra Canal in Helmand, high costs mean they are still out of the reach of many smaller farmers. However, when costs inevitably fall, only the availability of groundwater will inhibit ever-greater amounts of desert land falling under opium poppy cultivation in the future. For policymakers concerned about the drugs issue, this could pose considerable legacy issues for NATO and the international intervention in Afghanistan.

<sup>41</sup> Farmers claim prices for panels have fallen by more than half over the last five years. Reports suggest there are a growing number of businesses now selling solar panels in Kandahar City, with talk of further dealerships in Farah City.

<sup>42</sup> Farmers in this area refer to diesel costs of PR 110/litre (\$1.10), and using three litres of diesel per hour per *jerib*. They claim that it takes 2.5 hours to irrigate a *jerib* of land in the spring and four hours in the summer. With irrigation taking place every three to four days depending on levels of precipitation over the season, the costs are considered high.

## 4. Truly a Cross Cutting Issue

Counter-narcotics is currently the elephant in the room that no one wants to talk about. Political leadership on the issue has always been a challenge for both the international community and the Afghan government. There have simply been far too many disagreements on how different drug control measures should be weighted, with particular discord over the amount of emphasis placed on eradication of the standing crop. However, with Transition approaching, there is even less consensus, and even fewer conversations about the way forward. Development, military and political institutions that once squabbled over what to do about increasing drugs production have returned to their respective mandates—now more narrowly defined—and are much less willing to discuss how the drugs issue sits within their post-2014 plans. However, the fact remains that an increase in opium poppy cultivation and a growth in the drugs economy are both virtually inevitable.

On one level, less pressure from national and international actors to achieve short-term reductions in cultivation regardless of conditions or the potential for negative repercussions is helpful. Over the last decade, reducing cultivation in a given area over a short time frame had increasingly been held up as evidence of state power, and as a proxy for strong leadership on the part of provincial and district governors or even international civilian and military authorities. As a consequence, there has been a tendency to adopt short-term coercive measures in response to threats of rising cultivation—in other words, a policy of “not on my watch.”

This pressure has led to ill-chosen eradication efforts in districts such as Sherzad in Nangarhar in 2010, and the desire to push eradication into areas of Helmand where there are no viable alternatives to poppy, including north of the Boghra Canal. Pressure for results with insufficient regard for the wider consequences also led to proposals in earlier years for aerial chemical eradication. In addition, short-term drug reduction targets underpinned attempts to enlist development institutions in classic crop substitution schemes that have since been heavily criticized in evaluative work.<sup>43</sup>

However, there is a big difference between placing drug control measures at the forefront of dialogue with the Afghan state and its representatives,

and ignoring the drugs phenomenon altogether. Unfortunately, this seems to be the direction in which policy is currently headed. In the long run, it is difficult to imagine how policymakers can turn a blind eye to something that is playing an increasingly important role in Afghanistan’s political economy—both now and in the sensitive transition years ahead.

### Presentational, political and legal issues

Whether they concern acrimony over public and private sector corruption, uncertainty over the Afghan-US Bilateral Security Agreement, disagreements over the government taxing US assistance, or disputes over the handling of Taliban reconciliation, the presentational challenges Afghanistan faces in the international media are already significant. Even if these issues are resolved, how easy will it be for the Afghan state to secure the level of financial assistance discussed at the summits in Chicago and Tokyo if the production and trade in drugs is rising? How will western electorates and politicians respond to this trend, along with the inevitable rhetoric in the media that will accompany it? It is hard to imagine that a public image of Afghanistan as a “narco-state” governed by a “narcocracy” would lead to much support for the allocation of development aid to the country, particularly given the financial troubles of many donor nations. This problem is likely to be especially acute in the United Kingdom, which was the “lead nation” (subsequent “partner nation”) on counter-narcotics, and has led military efforts in Helmand Province since 2006.

If the international community ends up backing away from sustained engagement and assistance in tackling the drugs question, it is also likely that Afghan officials will seek to deflect blame when cultivation continues to rise. In the context of the reductions of several years ago, several provincial governors were quick to suggest that western donors had not lived up to their side of the bargain and delivered the “promised” development assistance. And in recent media interviews, the Ministry of Interior has warned that without the international community’s support for equipment and other resources, the government will be unable to effectively pursue a counter-narcotics agenda. Such rhetoric will only further sour relations between western donors and the Afghan government. It is also likely to be poorly received by commentators and electorates in donor countries, who may echo the narratives of betrayal and duplicity that have been associated with the

<sup>43</sup> UNODC, “Thematic Evaluation of UNODC Alternative Development Initiatives: Report by the Independent Evaluation Unit” (UNODC: Vienna, 2005), 2.



deaths of western soldiers at the hands of ANSF. All of this would be further compounded if rising drug production in Afghanistan were also accompanied by a rise in heroin-related deaths in western nations.

There are also legal implications to the drugs issue in Afghanistan. Under US domestic law, Afghanistan is designated a major illicit drug producing country. Like other drug producing and drug transit countries, it is therefore subject to an annual assessment by the US government.<sup>44</sup> Countries that are viewed to have “failed demonstrably to make substantial efforts during the last 12 months to adhere to international counter narcotics agreements and to take certain counter narcotics measures set forth in US law”<sup>45</sup> can be subject to the loss of 50 percent of their annual bilateral development assistance. They are also likely to see US officials voting against the provision of loans from multilateral financial institutions, unless a waiver of national interest is issued by the US President and agreed by Congress.<sup>46</sup> There are also legal restrictions on providing foreign assistance to individuals who have either been involved in trafficking drugs directly or a “knowing assistor, abettor, conspirator or colluder with others in illicit trafficking.”<sup>47</sup> Ignoring the drugs issue is unlikely to ensure that current legislative provisions are met, reassure a US Congress already concerned about wasting public money on assistance to Afghanistan,<sup>48</sup>

44 Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, United States Department of State, “International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Volume 1: Drug and Chemical Control” (Washington, DC: INL, 2013), 13, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/204265.pdf> (accessed 8 August 2013).

45 “International Narcotics Control Strategy Report.”

46 See Committee on International Relations, US House of Representatives and Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate, “Legislation on Foreign Relations Through 2002, Volume I-A of Volumes I-A and I-B, Current Legislation and Related Executive Orders, Foreign Assistance Act 1961, Section 490 (1) and (2),” 189-192, <http://transition.usaid.gov/policy/ads/faa.pdf> (accessed 8 August 2013).

47 FAA 1961, Section 487 (a) 2, 183.

48 See Opening Statement of Chairman Jason Chaffetz, Subcommittee on National Security “U.S. Direct Assistance in Afghanistan: Ensuring Transparency and Accountability” February 13, 2013, <http://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Opening-Statement-of-Chairman-Jason-Chaffetz-2-13-13.pdf> (accessed 8 August 2013); Opening Statement of Chairman Menendez, United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Hearing, “Assessing the Transition in Afghanistan,” July 11, 2013, <http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Menendez%20Statement%20Assessing%20the%20Transition%20in%20Afghanistan%20July%2011%202013.pdf> (accessed 8 August 2013); and John Sopko (SIGAR), Testimony Before the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, “Challenges affecting US Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan,” 10 April 2013, <http://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Sopko-Testimony-Final.pdf> (accessed

or generate political support for maintaining foreign assistance from the World Bank and other donor organisations.

While serious, the issues presented above are probably manageable to a degree, especially if western public opinion can be convinced of the need for continued engagement in Afghanistan. Far more important are the very real practical challenges that the mandates and priorities surrounding the future development, security and governance of Afghanistan will face if the realities of the drugs issue are ignored. The basic standards of good development practice demand an understanding of the socio-economic and political environment in which interventions are implemented, of how different actors respond to these interventions, and of what the possible outcomes of any action might be. The development community has established a range of different tools to support this kind of contextual work, including logical frameworks, stakeholder analysis, conflict analysis, and requirements for the completion of various technical appraisals. In a country like Afghanistan, where the trade and production of drugs shapes much of the physical, political and economic landscape, a proper understanding of the issue is surely a critical component in any contextual analysis.

## Development in a drugs environment

Development organisations rightly argue that they do not have a counter-narcotics mandate. However, their actions (or lack of them) can still have an impact on efforts to help rural communities reduce their dependency on opium as a livelihood option, as well on the achievement of their own poverty alleviation objectives. Here, the Helmand Food Zone offers a useful example of how a failure to target interventions at the land-poor not only facilitated a relocation of cultivation north of the Boghra Canal—exacerbating the drug problem—but also increased the vulnerability of some of the most marginal groups in rural Helmand. Farmers who remain in the Food Zone as sharecroppers—as well as those working some of the more recently settled desert land—all show the signs of growing destitution. Yet little is apparently being done for them. Farmers north of the Boghra Canal are now firm supporters of the Taliban, highly dependent on opium poppy, and suffer economic distress when the crop fails. While these political and economic effects were obviously not the intention of the Food Zone initiative, they are nevertheless its unintended consequence. Were this group of farmers to return to the canal command area, it would present obvious development, governance and security challenges to a post-Transition provincial authority.

August 8 2013).

Drugs also pose challenges to some of the government's NPPs, particularly the ones dealing with infrastructure. For example, there are plans to bring greater amounts of land under irrigation, involving not just the large scale irrigation projects in the Helmand River Valley planned by the Ministry of Energy and Water,<sup>49</sup> but also smaller schemes implemented through the National Solidarity Programme and the National Water and Natural Resources Development Programme. If these schemes are implemented in areas with weak markets and unstable security, and without additional attempts to encourage crop and income diversification, there is a danger they could result in significant increases in the amount of land producing opium. In addition to the inevitable presentational challenges, this could potentially undermine development outcomes by consolidating the economic and political power of local elites who are involved in the drugs trade, and who may profit from conflict and insecurity.

Road construction efforts may face similar problems, especially where projects are not coordinated with other development interventions. For example, both the military and development institutions have given great priority to building roads into the Spinghar foothills in Nangarhar. These efforts were apparently driven by the assumption that building a road would lead to agricultural diversification by improving market access. Consequently, while road building ran parallel with efforts to ban opium production, it was not accompanied by any meaningful investments in income diversification. In the absence of any agricultural commodities to transport, rural communities have come to see these roads not as facilitators for trade, but as vehicles of oppression, reinforcing already widely-held conspiracy theories about the international presence in general.<sup>50</sup> Some of these roads are now under the territorial control of armed opposition groups, have Taliban checkpoints along them and are used to transport opium to be sold in the bazaar in Shadal.

These examples are not meant to suggest that irrigation, road, and other infrastructure projects

49 Shahaï Murtazai, "Pakistan to design Farah river dam," *Tolo News*, 24 February 2013. <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/9557-pakistani-firm-to-design-farah-river-dam> (accessed 8 August 2013).

50 The same responses can be heard in Zahre District in areas such as Pashmul and Howz-i Madad, where the road construction is typically viewed in a particularly negative light due to the loss of significant amounts of agricultural land, including vineyards (fieldwork in Kandahar, December 2012). In Nangarhar, roads into rural areas are increasingly seen as the means by which Afghan and international military forces can subjugate the local population. See Mansfield, "All Bets are Off!"

should not take place. Rather, they are intended to highlight the need to consider the intended and unintended development and counter-narcotics outcomes of any new projects. For example, a road constructed in areas where there are few market opportunities and little history of state penetration will produce quite different results to one built in areas where there is already a degree of crop and income diversification and market penetration, and where state-society relations are more established. Ultimately, in any cases where interventions might lead to an increase in the production and trade of opiates, it is important that mitigating actions are pursued.

Regarding drug crop cultivation, policies must go beyond basic questions of "do no harm" (i.e. ensuring that programmes or projects do not inadvertently encourage illicit drug crop cultivation, trafficking or use). If planned and implemented correctly, there is significant scope for interventions to make a positive contribution to both counter-narcotics and development outcomes. This requires: understanding the multifunctional role that opium poppy plays in rural livelihoods within a given geographic area and how this differs by socioeconomic group; identifying how an intervention might create winners and losers within a given community; and ultimately assessing how the planned intervention will affect the overall wellbeing of the different groups within the population, as well as their involvement in opium poppy cultivation.

Ultimately, such a process would involve developing policies and programmes that are informed by their potential impacts on the illicit drug problem. It may subsequently involve adjusting the focus of development programmes and projects so that they recognise and understand the potential impact they might have on the issue, and taking steps to maximise positive impacts when conducting such activities. It could also entail more coordinated and complementary interventions at national, provincial and district levels.

## Politics in a drugs environment

Much of the political debate on drugs in Afghanistan focuses on the Taliban's role in encouraging opium poppy cultivation, taxing the crop and supporting the trade—either as a way to achieve political and territorial objectives or as a source of financial gain. The reality is more complex, involving multiple actors both inside and outside state structures, all of whom are looking to gain financial, patronage and political support from involvement in the drugs trade.

It seems likely that drug money will play an important part in next year's presidential elections. In Afghanistan's "political marketplace,"<sup>51</sup> even temporary loyalty must be paid for. This will require power and patronage, both of which can be easily purchased with the profits from involvement in the drugs trade. As such, it seems almost inevitable that democracy and drugs will become frequent bedfellows in a post-Transition Afghanistan, with obvious implications for the corruption of the political system and the actors within it.

State actors will also need to broker political settlements with rural elites in order to confirm allegiances, secure territory and get out the vote for the presidential elections and the parliamentary elections the following year. In some areas, a return to cultivation is likely to be part of the explicit or implicit political bargains that are made. Those most likely to gain from a return to opium production are local elites and armed actors; they will gain not only the support of the rural population, but also the financial means to further challenge state authority. Reductions in aid flows from Kabul and increasing cultivation in the provinces will likely exacerbate the centrifugal forces already at work in Afghanistan.

Eradication is also likely to become less of a priority in an election year. Getting the rural population to vote in areas of poppy cultivation will be hard enough given the security situation. In this respect trying to secure people's votes while destroying their crops would be like running a US election campaign under the slogan "Pay much higher taxes"! In the event that the authorities actually try to enforce a ban, anti-government forces will likely be the only winners.

## Security in a drugs environment

The production and trade of drugs also presents significant challenges for the integrity of the ANSF. The most obvious is the risk of corruption, of individuals or units extracting rent from the production and trade of drugs or even getting directly involved in the business themselves. This would in turn impact on public perceptions of the state. There is also the question of how the ANSF will support the state in securing areas where counter-narcotics policies threaten the interests of local elites and the rural population and may lead to violent resistance.

51 For a description of how the "political marketplace" works, see Alex de Waal, "Mission without end? Peacekeeping in the African political marketplace," *International Affairs* 85, no. 1 (2009): 99-113.

Elements of the ANSF are already engaged in counter-narcotics efforts and will remain deeply embedded in areas where the production of opium and opiates is likely to increase. For instance, in areas of Helmand such as Marjah and Nad-i Ali, the ALP have been actively enforcing a ban on opium poppy cultivation. In some cases this has even led to ALP commanders taking on an expeditionary role, moving beyond their designated areas of operation in attempting to impose a ban in the desert north of the Boghra Canal. This has not always ended well, with ALP personnel often extracting rents in areas where they do not depend on the local population for support. In Zhare and Panjwai districts in Kandahar Province, the ALP has also used counter-narcotics efforts to exploit local communities, extracting payments from farmers who persist with cultivation.<sup>52</sup>

By contrast, other elements of the ALP in Helmand have not been as willing to implement the provincial administration's counter-narcotics efforts. Instead, they have encouraged or at least facilitated a return to opium poppy cultivation within their areas. In Malgir in Nahr-i Seraj, for example, farmers report that both local ALP and Afghan National Police (ANP) commanders have taken a united stand with the local population in supporting opium poppy cultivation during the 2012/13 growing season.<sup>53</sup> There are also reports that these commanders are looking to absorb the *two-khord* (112.5 gram) opium tax that the Taliban collected on each *jerib* of opium poppy when they were dominant in the area.<sup>54</sup> According to local speculation, provincial authorities have little interest in acting against a unified Barakzai population in Malgir, fearful that they will lose their support if they pursue a robust eradication<sup>55</sup> campaign in the area. In Sra Qala next to Gereshk City, there are reports that farmers have

52 David Mansfield, "'Taxation' in Central Helmand and Kandahar," paper for the UK Government, March 2013.

53 As one farmer put it "we accept the government in this area; we don't kill government people, we don't put mines in the road but we will grow poppy" (fieldwork in Malgir, April/May 2013).

54 At the time of fieldwork this tax had not yet been collected but farmers reported that the population had been informed that they would need to pay and claimed that a list of farmers and the payments due had been prepared by the *mirab* (water master). It was also claimed that the ALP commander and many of his soldiers had also cultivated opium poppy. Fieldwork supports this claim, with four out of the five households with members in the ANP or ALP growing opium poppy in the 2012/13 growing season.

55 Farmers report that the eradication campaign in the 2012/13 growing season was concentrated within one kilometre of the road running alongside the canal. Between the river and the village, the poppy remained untouched.

had to make cash payments to the ALP and the ANP in order to protect their opium crop. At the same time, although the Taliban are physically absent from the area, they have made it known through the village elite that they still expect cash payments following the opium harvest.

It is possible that competition over rents on high value commodities such as opium will become pervasive in some parts of post-Transition Afghanistan, perhaps so much so that involvement in the drugs trade may simply become a matter of survival. For example, an ALP commander that does not secure future revenue streams and support from the local population by allowing poppy cultivation in his area could find himself ousted by armed opposition groups, or even a better-resourced rival within the ALP itself.

Even the ANA—generally considered the most trustworthy section of the ANSF—is having to consider its priorities when it comes to government efforts to reduce poppy cultivation. Pressing a population to reduce opium cultivation while simultaneously seeking their support against insurgent groups is a major challenge, especially in areas where few viable alternatives to the crop exist. In fact, the ANA has always been a somewhat reluctant partner in securing areas for crop destruction. As discussed above in the context of Khogiani in Nangarhar, there is a strong likelihood that military commanders will need to find some kind of accommodation on opium production with the local population if they want to pursue counterinsurgency efforts in more insecure terrain.

Another challenge the drug issue poses for the security sector relates to recruitment, retention and the ethnic balance within the ANSF. For instance, it is estimated that more than one-third of all Pashtuns that have joined the ANA come from Nangarhar Province.<sup>56</sup> In-depth fieldwork in the province further suggests that the vast majority of Nangarharis joining the ANA are from southern districts bordering Pakistan, and that enlistment was in direct response to the economic hardships resulting from bans on opium production.<sup>57</sup> The

return of opium poppy in these and other districts may reduce enlistment rates or lead to problems of retention, although research in Spinghar revealed households with family members in the ANSF that were also cultivating opium poppy on their land.<sup>58</sup>

However, the main security issue is the growing coalescence of opium poppy and armed government opposition. For example, in the Spinghar foothills, allegiances are now increasingly fluid, with frequent examples of families with household members in the ANSF, whose near or distant relatives have joined the Taliban, and who themselves make contributions to the insurgency at the local mosque in the form of cash payments of around PKR 3,000 to 5,000 (USD 29 to USD 58). In the area's upper districts, clinics, schools and government workers all coexist with the presence of (and in some cases membership in) armed opposition groups and the widespread cultivation of opium poppy. There is a similar fluidity in allegiances in Balkh, where there are reports in some areas of accommodations between the ALP and anti-government groups based on family and tribal connections between individuals on opposing sides.

Currently, the Taliban have limited their demands for families to withdraw members from the ANSF to certain parts of Nangarhar. Fearing a potential backlash, they are also not coercing the population in this respect. Were the Taliban to consolidate their position in these areas, they may become less tolerant of families who benefit from protection of their opium crop while some of their members are fighting for the government in the ANA. This could have a disproportionate effect on the number of Pashtuns in the ANA, changing the ethnic balance in the force. A return to or increase in cultivation in other parts of the country might also reduce individuals' economic need to be in the ANSF, depressing enlistment and retention rates. This problem is likely to be especially acute in areas like Badakhshan, where ANSF enlistment has been an important livelihood strategy in a province with limited licit employment opportunities.

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56 Ray Rivera, "Afghan army attracts few where fear reigns," *The New York Times*, 6 September 2011.

57 "Enlisting in the Afghan National Army (ANA) has become the primary risk mitigation strategy for those in the districts of Shinwar, Achin and Khogiani. For example, in the district of Achin more than half of those interviewed had members of their household in the ANA; in Shinwar it was over a third; and in Khogiani one quarter of respondents had members of their

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household in the ANA...It is also notable that in the districts of Kama and Surkhrud—areas that are less exposed to risk and where households have largely succeeded in diversifying on-farm and non-farm income—none of those interviewed in 2010 reported having members of their household in either the ANA or the ANP." David Mansfield, "The Ban on Opium Production across Nangarhar—A Risk Too Far?" *International Journal of Environmental Studies* 68, no. 3 (2011): 381-395.

58 Mansfield, "All Bets are Off!"

## 5. Which Way Forward?

The language of drugs as a “cross-cutting issue” has existed in Afghanistan for more than a decade. It has been included in the communiqués of international conferences, in various incarnations of the Afghan National Development Strategy and in numerous policy statements by western governments. However, despite all the rhetoric, there is little evidence that the drugs issue has actually been factored into the design and implementation of wider development, governance and security interventions.

In practice, the drugs issue is still largely misunderstood by senior policy makers who remain detached from the complex social, economic and political processes that influence opium production. In fact, conversations at the policy level about the multiple rural realities in Afghanistan are often dismissed as being “in the weeds.” Unfortunately, a naïve search for a magic bullet that will provide immediate short-term results continues to dominate the debate: “Why don’t we just buy the crop?”, “Why don’t we just legalise?”, “Why don’t we just guarantee to buy the wheat crop at a high price?” and, of course, “Why don’t we just destroy the crop?” This use of the word “just” when discussing any aspect of Afghanistan policy, let alone drugs issues, seems particularly misplaced.

The fact is there is not “just” an alternative to opium production in Afghanistan (or indeed elsewhere). The country will certainly be producing opium for at least another generation unless there is a sharp fall in the demand for opiates across the globe. Enduring, country-wide reductions in opium production will not emerge from the introduction of a single high value crop, efforts to increase wheat yields or the deployment of biological or chemical agents to destroy the crop. There is no technical fix to opium production in Afghanistan, no matter how tempting it may be to look for one.

Sustained reductions in cultivation tend to be localised. Apart from those areas around the provincial centres where socioeconomic and political conditions are conducive, results also tend to be slow and hard won. They are an outcome of the interaction of efforts to improve governance, security and economic development in a given area, not just specific drug control interventions. Reductions in one area are likely to be accompanied by increases in others—the so-called “balloon effect”—as economic conditions shift and political actors realign. There is also no predictable downward trajectory of aggregate reductions; both people and markets will respond in different ways to

new realities evolving as a consequence of outside interventions and recalibrations of economic, social and political interests. We can see this process at work in provinces where cultivation has been reduced over the last few years, where the impact of the bans on opium production has varied by location, by socioeconomic group and over time.

Drugs are going to play a much more significant role in the political economy of Afghanistan in the coming years. Given this scenario, there is little choice but to develop a better understanding of the likely effects that the drugs economy will have on Transition and subsequent “transformation,”<sup>59</sup> and to identify ways to better manage the risks it poses. Such efforts must go beyond simple assessments of levels of cultivation to analyse how drugs will shape the political economy of the countryside as well as the body politic in Kabul. Some might refer to efforts to integrate an understanding of the drugs economy into future development plans in Afghanistan as doing “development in a drugs environment” or “counter-narcotics mainstreaming,” others as doing “good development” or perhaps simply doing their jobs properly. Either way, the issue cannot be ignored.

Past efforts to promote a better understanding of the drugs issue and its wider impacts have failed to gain traction for a number of reasons (see Table 2). Leadership among international institutions and the Afghan government was lacking. There was also a preference for stand-alone counter-narcotics interventions—often backed by generous funding—that did little to encourage close cooperation across different themes and sectors. Significant knowledge gaps, political pressure for annual reductions and rapid staff turnover at the organisations involved all encouraged the pursuit of short-term and simplistic solutions. This situation also deterred learning about what worked in the past, and did little to encourage the development of detailed understanding of local contexts and subsequent analysis of how interventions might play out. Finally, the downturn in levels of cultivation in 2008 resulted in a general loss of interest as individuals and institutions moved on to the next problem metric. As Transition looms, some of these same factors persist, particularly among the senior leadership in Western capitals. However, there are some windows of opportunity that are widening, particularly among development professionals who realise that ignoring the drugs issue risks undermining their future efforts.

59 A term coined by the World Bank, referring optimistically to the period from 2015 through to 2025.

*Table 2: Factors Discouraging Counter-narcotics Mainstreaming*

Factors that have discouraged counter-narcotics mainstreaming in the past	Factors that could encourage counter-narcotics mainstreaming in the future
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Lack of Leadership:</b> Lack of buy-in by senior officials (Afghan and international) who saw the drugs issue in terms of a set of “stand-alone” interventions that could attract extra project funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased sense that “business as usual” not acceptable—growing understanding of how expanding drugs economy will impact on priorities in development, security and governance</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Attribution:</b> A counter-narcotics community that advocated a counter-narcotics project or programme approach; saw mainstreaming as complex process where reductions in cultivation would be medium to long term and not directly attributable to counter-narcotics budget lines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A counter-narcotics community, including the MCN, that has largely fallen in behind an approach that looks at integrating the drugs issue into conventional development programmes and still sees direct counter-narcotics efforts as more catalytic and technical</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Risk aversion:</b> Lack of ownership of the drugs issue among senior development agencies and officials due to pressure for short-term results and simplistic solutions that often ran contrary to agencies’ mandates and best practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growing recognition that expanding drugs economy will undermine delivery of development outcomes and create presentational challenges for continued development assistance</li> <li>• Evolution of development assistance to “normal” programmes without political deadlines</li> <li>• Consensus within drug control community on the need for a more balanced approach that includes inclusive development; little to no appetite or capacity for comprehensive eradication effort</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Downturn in cultivation:</b> Rising cultivation prompted calls for engagement of the development community between 2004-2007, but momentum lost when cultivation fell from 2008 onward</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultivation rising once more—threat of serious increases requires response; recognition that something other than coercive responses is necessary</li> <li>• Coercion may no longer be a real option in a changed security framework and with the departure of international troops</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sustainability:</b> Driven by technical staff from key Western donors with little support from “drug control community”; momentum lost when staff rotated out</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Body of work on mainstreaming, including guidelines and reports, completed with support from UK Department for International Development and World Bank</li> <li>• Counter-narcotics community in support of counter-narcotics mainstreaming approach; attempts to institutionalise within MCN</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Capacity:</b> knowledge gaps, particularly in counter-narcotics community, on how different interventions might impact the different groups involved in opium poppy cultivation; this meant that policy of mainstreaming could not be turned into practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accumulated experience and growing body of published empirical data to guide assessments and operational practice</li> <li>• Greater emphasis in monitoring and evaluation of development programmes that can facilitate improved learning on how different primary stakeholders respond to interventions</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Compartmentalised:</b> Institutional mandates encouraged compartmentalising and “staying in lane”—everyone focuses on own mandates and project-specific indicators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accumulated evidence of unintended consequences of other development interventions undercuts idea that interventions are disconnected or “stand alone”</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Too much money:</b> Plentiful project funding, especially from 2009 onwards during “civilian surge”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less money will be available, so more need for coordination and collaboration but less money to make a difference</li> </ul>

The primary challenge is to change the nature of the policy debate on the drugs problem in Afghanistan and in Western nations, particularly in light of the potential for significant rises in cultivation in the near term. There has been enough hand wringing and short-sightedness over the problem of drugs in Afghanistan. What is required now is a heavy dose of realism, especially in light of the current environment of political transition and sharply declining aid. Drugs

will continue to form an integral part of the political economy of Afghanistan; to ignore the role they will play in shaping the physical and political geography of the country in the coming years would be negligent. Control over the revenues from drug production will influence livelihood trajectories, economic growth and local political settlements. They will influence the behaviour and perception of the ANSF, and even play an instrumental role in future elections. Policymakers

need to acknowledge this reality and start seeing drugs as part of the economic, political and physical landscape in which they are operating. This will allow them to properly identify how drugs will affect and be affected by the proposed security, governance and development interventions outlined for Afghanistan post-2014.

On this basis, **all national, multilateral and bilateral programmes should be assessed on the basis of their potential impact on the production, trade and use of opium and its derivatives.** Such assessments should be mandatory and part of the approval process for financial and technical assistance that lies with the Ministry of Finance. However, this need not mean a drawn out, expensive and bureaucratic process that would delay implementation. A counter-narcotics review is simply part of good programme design, and entails considering the impact interventions will have on the different socioeconomic groups involved in opium poppy cultivation, as well as anticipating some of the incentives and dynamics they might produce. The format for these assessments should draw from the guidelines for counter-narcotics mainstreaming developed by the World Bank in 2007. The first priority should be a counter-narcotics review of key NPPs in order to establish their potential impact on the drugs question and ensure their activities are geared toward achieving maximum impacts in this regard (see Table 3). In particular, there is a need to build synergies between different sectoral interventions through the coordination of complementary activities and effective area based planning. This way, there is more chance of maximising both development and counter-narcotics outcomes.

**There is also a clear need to look beyond simple models of crop substitution.** Evidence points to the fact that rural communities are more likely to transition out of opium production where they can realise broader development goals. These consist not only of improved household risk management through the diversification of on-farm, off-farm and non-farm income, but also the improved provision of public goods to communities in a way that strengthens their social compact with the state. Increased non-farm income can also play a key role in building household resilience to shocks produced by crop failure, medical emergencies, family crises—and bans on opium poppy cultivation. Meanwhile, efforts to strengthen the livestock sector can encourage a shift in cropping patterns, as well as improved income and social protection. Greater investment is required in these and other areas if reductions in cultivation are not to simply result in its relocation to former desert lands beyond the reach of the state.

**There is a need to focus development investments in rural areas where they will both deliver realistic outcomes and be practicable post-2014.** The NPPs often appear to be geographically blind apart from some discussion of “economic corridors” and provincial-level investments. Beyond this, there is little sense of the government’s geographic priorities within provinces, or of how area-specific investments might support state stability, equitable economic growth and efforts to support shifts out of opium poppy cultivation. There is thus a need to set geographic priorities that are more informed by likely security scenarios post-2014. After Transition, there are likely to be areas around the main highways and provincial centres where the ANSF continues to dominate. In such terrain, sustained development investments will be possible and opium poppy cultivation is unlikely to return. However, there will also be areas within many provinces where a deteriorating security situation and the contracting reach of the state will render development investments either inefficient or impracticable. The challenge will be in the intermediate areas where the central state does not have a concentration of the means of violence, but maintains influence through local power brokers. Careful consideration will be necessary regarding the appropriate mechanisms for delivery of assistance under these conditions, the development outcomes that can be expected, and the potential responses to enduring opium poppy cultivation in these areas. Policymakers will need to learn to work within this challenging political terrain unless the government wishes to remain hemmed into the lower valleys.

**There is a need to strengthen the technical and strategic capacity of the MCN so that it can support line ministries in maximising the positive counter-narcotics outcomes of their programmes.** To do so, the Ministry needs to build an analytical and advisory capacity that draws on a better understanding of the various potential impacts of different interventions on the drugs problem. This evidence base should be used to develop operational guidelines to support line ministries in areas such as irrigation and infrastructure, as well as in interventions aimed at the land-poor.

**There is also a need to include counter-narcotics-sensitive indicators in current and future multilateral performance assessment agreements.** The Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework forms the basis for assessing the performance of both donor nations and the Afghan government. This should include counter-narcotics-sensitive indicators such as the diversification of both crops and on-farm and non-farm income. These can help ensure that conditions are met for enduring reductions in cultivation, and actions taken to monitor and limit the impact of the drugs trade on the political fabric of the country.

Table 3: Example of Counter-narcotics Mainstreaming in a Sample of National Priority Programmes

National Rural Access Programme						
Change model	Current level of Counter-narcotics mainstreaming	Risk of increased opium production if counter-narcotics not adequately mainstreamed	Risk mitigation	Design	Implementation	Monitoring and evaluation
<p>Improve ANSF access to opium poppy growing areas</p> <p>Increase provision of public and private sector services</p> <p>Improve population's access to agricultural and labour markets</p> <p>Increase direct wage labour opportunities for rural communities (approx. nine million labour days)</p>	<p>Low—mentioned only in passing</p>	<p>Risk: High if not coordinated and sequenced with investments in income generation</p> <p>Roads seen by local communities as vehicle for subjugation by ANSF, resulting in resentment and subsequent resistance to government</p> <p>Easier to transport opium and its derivatives</p>	<p>Adopt area-based planning with coordinated implementation among other relevant NPPs to build necessary synergies for delivering both development and counter-narcotics outcomes</p> <p>Avoid implementing in isolation in areas where viable alternatives not in place or where other income generation programmes not in operation</p> <p>Appropriate law-enforcement checks on roads from opium producing areas</p>	<p>Include counter-narcotics impact assessment along with those for other cross cutting issues (gender and environment) as part of design, monitoring and evaluation</p> <p>Include counter-narcotics impacts among criteria for prioritising roads under national plan</p> <p>Include counter-narcotics-relevant indicators such as crop and income diversification in proximity to roads and levels of opium poppy cultivation</p>	<p>Prioritise opium poppy growing areas where implementation can be integrated with income generating NPPs</p> <p>Where appropriate, focus on labour-intensive methods of road construction, implemented during periods of peak labour demand for opium poppy, thereby raising opportunity costs of labour the crop</p>	<p>Include counter-narcotics impact as part of evaluation of overall program</p> <p>Conduct area-based evaluation to examine development outcomes and impact on poppy cultivation</p>



National Water and Natural Resources Development Programme

Risk of increased opium production if counter-narcotics not adequately mainstreamed

Current level of Counter-narcotics mainstreaming

Monitoring and evaluation

Change model	Current level of Counter-narcotics mainstreaming	Risk mitigation	Design	Implementation	Monitoring and evaluation
Opium poppy offers relatively high returns on irrigated land, is less vulnerable to crop failure when subject to water shortage than many high value horticultural crops and is one of few crops that can meet recurrent costs of deep well irrigation	Low—referred to in context of deep wells  Looks to include conditionality (make development assistance contingent on reductions in poppy) on Water User Associations; includes section on drugs as cross-cutting issue but not discussed in context or adequately mainstreamed in main body of document or design	Risk: High  Target of 154,000 ha increase in irrigated area; potential for significant increases in land under opium poppy if implemented in areas where conditions not conducive to diversification into licit crops and expansion in non-farm income	Include mandatory counter-narcotics impact assessment as part of appraisal of irrigation schemes, especially major irrigation works in areas with history of opium poppy cultivation  Include counter-narcotics-relevant indicators such as crop and income diversification in proximity to roads and levels of opium poppy cultivation  Avoid conditionality which has a bad record in Afghanistan. <sup>1</sup>	Include developing better understanding of counter-narcotics impact in component 5.3.4.7 (“Develop capacity to measure socio-economic impacts of Irrigation”)	Assess against counter-narcotics-relevant indicators  Conduct area-based evaluation to examine development outcomes and impact on poppy cultivation

<sup>1</sup> See Mansfield, David (2002) “The Failure of Quid Pro Quo: Alternative Development in Afghanistan”. Paper prepared for the International Conference on Alternative Development in Drug Control and Cooperation, Feldafing (January 7-12).

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