

Human Security and Livelihoods of Rural Afghans, 2002-2003



**A report for
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**Feinstein International Famine Center
Youth and Community Program
Tufts University USA**

Feinstein International Famine Center, Tufts University
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Executive Summary

This report documents and analyzes recent countrywide trends in the relationship between human security and livelihoods throughout rural Afghanistan from 2002-2003. All countrywide information is generated by analyses of 2003 Nationwide Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) survey data. All analyses of NRVA data, unless otherwise noted, are conducted by the Tufts University team. In addition, the report includes detailed analyses on six provinces based on primary research by the Tufts team in Badghis, Balkh, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar.

The report emphasizes the important links among four key aspects of human security—human rights and personal security, societal and community security, economic and resource security, and governance and political security—in the livelihoods of rural Afghans and the prospects for peace and development in the country in the longer term. The report also examines and analyzes the formal, traditional, and customary mechanisms that are in place to address injustice and mitigate security and livelihood threats for the rural Afghan population. Policy recommendations are made to the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan, donor governments, and national and international organizations based on findings and analyses.

As shown throughout this report, the current state of rural Afghanistan poses tremendous challenges for the Afghan government and the international community. The international community must maintain its commitment to long-term growth and long-term change in Afghanistan. International assistance or national development strategies that ignore the long-term developmental and structural goals and sideline the moderate elements of Afghan society will not be successful. This report is intended to help hone the international commitment to Afghanistan and advocates for continued, long-term, and generous engagement to resolve the challenges illustrated by the data and analyses. This report is not about the failures or short-comings of the international community; it is about the need for the international community to remain involved and committed to long-term development.

EXECUTIVE FINDINGS

On human security and physical security:

1. The dominant perception of security and insecurity in Afghanistan reflects the experiences and orientation of the United Nations, the international community assisting in rebuilding the country, and the Afghan central government. This view of security is based largely on the ability of international and national relief and development staff to safely operate programs in certain areas. Levels of security (or insecurity) are determined by the number of attacks on or threats against expatriates, national staff of development organizations, government officials, and members of the newly trained Afghan National Army and police force. Areas or

entire provinces in which attacks and threats occur are considered High Risk or Medium Risk.

2. Countrywide, rural Afghans hold views and have had experiences of (in)security that are very different from those of the international community and the Afghan government. A vast majority of areas that are “High Risk/Hostile Environment” or “Medium Risk/Uncertain Environment” (i.e., highly insecure and essentially off-limits or areas where armed escorts are required) for the United Nations and international NGOs are often experienced as secure, with few reported conflicts, by the local rural populations. In contrast, regions that show up as “Low Risk/Permissive Environment” (i.e., areas considered secure for operations) on United Nations security maps are areas where local populations often report high levels of conflict and are experiencing insecurity at the hands of armed political groups, warlords, commanders and their associates, including district authorities and police forces.
3. Rural Afghans in Badghis, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar provinces define security based largely on their levels of human security, not simply on the cessation of fighting or armed attacks. Rural respondents perceive themselves to be secure if they are free from physical violence or threat of attack *and* have essential elements of human security, including access to health care, education, and economic opportunities.

On conditions for realizing human security:

4. Rural Afghans in Badghis, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar provinces report that the greatest threat to their physical security comes from the activities of political armed groups, bandits, commanders, militias, and, in some cases, the police, police soldiers, or government military; landmines and UXOs; and the activities of the Coalition forces. Rural Afghans, especially those in the more remote areas of these provinces, report that they rely largely on themselves to provide physical security for their villages. No respondent said that they relied on or turned to the police or national military for security.
5. The vast majority of rural Afghans in Badghis, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar provinces said that their security was linked to access to clean drinking water, education for boys *and* girls, health services, trained doctors, access to medicines, economic opportunities, disarmament, and an end to internal fighting.
6. Rural Afghans in Badghis, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar provinces overwhelmingly spoke of the need for the Afghan government and the international community to work for peace and human security in Afghanistan. This was linked directly to the need for widespread disarmament. Selective disarmament of only some groups (as carried out under the Taliban regime) has resulted in small groups of armed men being able to control and terrorize entire

rural populations, as these populations no longer have any means of self-protection.

On political participation and the legal process:

7. The majority (>50%) of rural Afghans in Badghis, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar provinces have no knowledge of the constitutional process. Rural women are four times less likely to be aware of the constitutional process than rural men. All rural women interviewed in three of these provinces (Herat, Kabul, and Badghis) had never heard of a constitution. After learning about the new constitution from the Tufts team, rural women primarily stressed the importance of education for both boys and girls, health care, and equal rights for men and women, boys and girls. Rural men primarily stressed the need for a re-enforcement of *Sharia* law and for better economic opportunities.
8. Countrywide, the almost complete lack of participation of rural women in political and civil affairs is a direct obstacle to their human security and to their political rights, as well as to the nation-building process. Overwhelmingly, rural women country-wide have no role in selecting local leaders and are not represented by local officials.
9. Formal and traditional justice systems play a direct role in undermining the human rights of women and girls. The formal justice system appears to be incapable of preventing forced marriages of young girls or protecting women from domestic abuses and other violence. Rural women in Badghis, Balkh, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar provinces have little or no access to the formal, traditional, or customary justice systems (which are dominated by men) and therefore have practically no means of redress when faced with human rights abuses and threats to their human security.
10. The Pashtun custom of *Bad* or *badal*, which involves trading women and girls among families to solve major disputes and prevent revenge killings, continues in Afghanistan. Young women or girls given as part of *badal* have no voice in accepting or rejecting decisions for *badal*, which are made by village councils (*Jirgas* and *shuras*) composed of all men.

On the rights of women and girls within their homes and families:

11. Countrywide, the majority of rural women have little decision-making power within their households, even when they contribute to household income. They have little say in determining the sale of productive or non-productive household assets. Women have little to no say in the number or spacing of their children, or in the marriage partners of their children, in particular their daughters.
12. The majority of rural parents in Badghis, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar provinces that had placed a daughter under the age of 14 into early marriage (i.e.,

child bride), said they did so due to economic need. Most of these child brides were given to men many years their senior as a second or third wife. Many widows and women running female-headed households were child brides themselves, and women who were child brides appear to be more likely to face early widowhood. In nearly all indicators, widows were the most vulnerable population in the Tufts study.

On access to education and health care:

13. There are almost no rural, school-age girls attending school in the south and south central regions of Afghanistan. The primary reasons that both boys and girls in rural areas are not in school countrywide is lack of school facilities and the distance of available facilities. The highest rate of school enrollment of boys and girls is found in the north and northeast regions of Afghanistan.
14. Current insecurity is preventing rural boys and girls from attending school in rural districts in nine provinces. Girls are more likely to be withheld from school than boys in areas that are affected by insecurity.
15. In 38% of rural districts, the majority (> 50%) of rural Afghans have no access to any form of health care. The majority (>50%) of rural Afghans in 62% of rural districts have access to only basic health care, including health posts, basic health care centers, and traditional healers. These basic facilities often lack well-trained personnel and adequate medical supplies or medicines.
16. Between 43-78% of rural Afghans in Badghis, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar provinces have no access to reproductive health care. When they are able to access care, the majority (>50%) report that the care is of poor quality. The majority of rural women have no access to trained care during pregnancy and birth. Most rural Afghan women have no voice in family planning within their families, although many women wanted to learn more about options for birth control.
17. Access by rural Afghans to health care in Badghis, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar provinces is unequal, with men having greater access than women and children, and children having greater access than women.

On access to natural resources:

18. Countrywide, the majority (>50%) of rural Afghans use surface water (rivers, lakes, and irrigation ditches) as their primary source of drinking water. Countrywide, 48% report that their primary water source is contaminated or polluted. Both water quantity and water quality has worsened since 2002 for many rural Afghans. For example, some areas of Afghanistan reported an end to the drought and a bumper harvest in 2003, but many rural Afghans in Herat, Kabul, and Kandahar provinces continue to see decreasing water tables.

19. Countrywide, landlessness remains high. Conflict over access to land and water continues to cause instability for families and communities. Land and property disputes are extremely common, at times deadly, especially in areas with large numbers of returning refugees or internally displaced persons. Most people in Badghis, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar provinces reported either no change or a decrease in access to land since 2002. Many people sharecrop or rent land.
20. The effects of the drought continue to have a negative impact on livelihoods in much of rural Afghanistan. Rural populations countrywide reported continuing livestock reductions due to death or sale of animals, declining health of orchards and vineyards, and decreased access to fuel. Environmental degradation caused by conflict, drought, population movement, and deforestation exacerbates the problems of limited access to natural resources for many rural Afghans.

On livelihood strategies of rural Afghans:

21. Many Afghans in rural areas countrywide are not engaged strictly in agriculture, but rely on diversified livelihood strategies to generate household income. The type of non-agricultural employment differs by region. Women make contributions to household income in nearly all provinces in Afghanistan, but usually perform income-generating work literally within their homes, rather than in their villages. Almost no rural women generate income outside their villages. Rural women are paid significantly less than rural men for performing the same work, and in many instances are paid less than children. Children also contribute to household income in most areas of the country, and many families in Badghis, Herat, Kabul, and Kandahar provinces reported increasing the amount of their children's labor since 2002 due to economic hardship.
22. Rural Afghans continue to use migration as part of their livelihood strategies, but most migration since 2002 appears to be rural to urban and inside the borders of Afghanistan as opposed to cross-border migration. Many rural Afghan men in Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar provinces reported migrating to urban centers to take advantage of the boom in the construction industry (occurring in Herat, Kabul, and Kandahar cities). Surprisingly, many rural households reported that migration of a family member for economic purposes had either no effect or a negative effect on the household.
23. Poppy production has increased among rural Afghan populations since 2002 and is occurring in a greater number of provinces. Poppy production is labor intensive, and households engaged in poppy often rely on the labor of women and children household members. Yet, women have little decision-making power as to whether or not their household engages in poppy production. Poppy remains one of the only industries in which rural Afghans can readily access credit. Drug

rehabilitation centers are reporting cases of illness and death due to over-exposure of women and children during lancing, the initial phase in processing opium.

On access to markets and credit:

24. Most rural Afghan households can access markets, even in very remote areas. Countrywide, very few rural Afghan women, however, are able to directly access markets due to cultural and household constraints. Improved security and better transportation has increased market access for Afghan males since 2002 in some areas (such as Kabul), but men in other areas (such as Kandahar) continue to face poor road networks, insecurity, and illegal taxation and extortion.
25. In Badghis, Herat, and Kandahar, the majority (>50%) of rural men are unable to access formal or informal sources of credit or to provide loans to their relatives or neighbors. Nearly all (91%) rural men in Nangarhar and half of rural men in Kabul are able to access credit. Very few women in our study population could access credit, and women reported that shopkeepers and relatives did not provide credit to rural women. However, the majority of rural Afghans in Badghis, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar provinces reported that they had increased their debt burdens since 2002.

On international humanitarian and development assistance:

26. Countrywide, most households who received assistance were provided with food as part of a free food distribution, food through food-for-work programs, or a combination of food and cash through work programs.
27. The majority (>50%) of the study population in Badghis, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar reported receiving some aid during 2002-2003. International assistance is reaching even very remote rural villages.
28. Many people in our study population in Badghis, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar reported interventions that had profound and positive effects on their lives and livelihoods. This was particularly true of improvements to water sources, education facilities, and the receipt of construction or shelter assets.
29. Overwhelmingly, countrywide, poor and very poor rural Afghan women and men prioritize improvement to their drinking water and irrigation structures. This is followed by improved access to health care, job opportunities, and road repair and construction. There are important differences in priorities based on gender and location.

On the formal judiciary:

30. The Afghan judiciary suffers from a severe lack of human capacity as well as material resources. Many judges lack adequate legal training. Public legal

advocates and defense attorneys do not exist within the Afghan legal system. Of those judges who are trained, the judicial leadership is divided between graduates of the *Sharia* School and those of the Law School at Kabul University. These groups are often at ideological loggerheads with each other. The three organs of the judiciary, the Ministry of Justice, the Supreme Court, and the Office of the Attorney General, lack effective coordination and communication and are often ideologically opposed.

31. The judiciary is highly susceptible to military and political influences at both the urban and rural level. Formal courts, including family courts, are either non-existent or barely functional in most rural areas. There are few women lawyers and judges in the urban areas and none in the rural areas, and rural women have great difficulty accessing the formal court system.

On police and detention centers in rural areas:

32. Very few police officers in rural areas of Badghis, Balkh, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar provinces have had any official police training. Many are still loyal to their former commanders, who often serve as the chief of police, army officers or district or provincial authorities. Police stations are extremely dilapidated and police officers lacked essential resources, including vehicles, communication equipment, and uniforms. Most police stations lack secure facilities for the storage of weapons. Most police officers use private weapons and take their weapons home after work hours.
33. The detention centers visited by the Tufts team in Balkh, Badghis, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Nangarhar provinces were in very poor condition and lacked basic necessities such as secure structures, sanitation facilities, and blankets for detainees. Prisoners are occasionally held in metal shipping containers or in private detention centers, and signs of mistreatment were common in the areas visited. Juvenile offenders were mixed with adult offenders in a number of centers visited by Tufts.

On traditional and customary justice systems:

34. Armed political groups, commanders, and warlords have strategically targeted traditional and customary justice systems (*Jirgas* and *shuras*) throughout rural Afghanistan in attempt to control local populations. In many instances, these predatory forces have successfully positioned their loyalists within these groups, thus undermining this avenue of justice for rural Afghans—which is often the only avenue available in rural areas.
35. In regions where political armed groups are able to exert control over the district government authorities, these groups often also have their members on the district *shura*, thus ensuring greater control of the district.

36. The current *shura* system operating in much of the country is based on a framework put in place by the Taliban regime that sought to replace the more democratic (though only for adult Afghan men) *Jirga* systems. With the Taliban regime now out of power, some communities are restructuring their *shuras*, but fewer are returning to the *Jirga* system.
37. However, some groups of rural Afghans, particularly among the tribal groups, are replacing the *shuras* with the more democratic (though only for adult males) *Jirga* system. This is, in part, an attempt to limit the influence of the armed political groups and commanders in control of the area, as well to minimize the interference of government district authorities.
38. Rural Afghan women are largely denied a direct voice in any *shura* or *Jirga* system and thus have little to no access to justice within either traditional or customary systems.

EXECUTIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations briefly summarize the detailed recommendations given at the end of this report. We stress the need for a clear recognition that a number of the causes of human insecurity throughout rural Afghanistan are deep-seated. As a result, there may be few, if any, short or medium term solutions. As demonstrated throughout this report, international humanitarian and development assistance programs *are* having positive impacts on individuals, communities, and livelihood strategies. However, tremendous challenges and needs remain, particularly in rural communities. Consequently, the international community must remain actively and strategically engaged in Afghanistan for the long-term.

Recommendation 1: Stop Co-optation of Aid by Armed Political Groups. The United States Department of State should take the lead on bringing together a small group of international experts with extensive knowledge and experience on issues of governance, government, and civil society in Afghanistan.¹ This group should examine ways in which international assistance can be distributed in Afghanistan that is outside of, or minimizes, the co-optation of the aid by armed political groups.

Recommendation 2: Water. Urgently and coherently address the serious issues of water scarcity and water contamination and degradation facing Afghans. To this end:

- Place water supply management within one ministry.
- Develop five-year strategy for rural and urban water protection.
- Institute a comprehensive national plan for well drilling and wellhead protection.
- Develop a short-term plan to prevent the dumping of waste material into water sources.
- Continue the present focus on assessing and repairing community irrigation systems.

¹ A list of names recommended by the Tufts team will be independently submitted.

Recommendation 3: Education. Continue to strengthen the education sector by upgrading structures and scholastic materials, improving teacher training, recruiting female teachers, and ensuring access to schools for rural girls and boys. Additionally, the curriculum of schools could be greatly enhanced by developing and offering courses in civic rights and responsibilities, hygiene, and sanitation. To this end:

- Focus on the quality of education.
- Look for ways to increase the school attendance of girls.
- Recognize and address the fact that few child brides attend school.
- Enhance curriculum to build a strong and active citizenship.
- Enhance curriculum to emphasize hygiene, sanitation, and health lessons.

Recommendation 4: Health Care. Continue to focus on training and on increasing access of rural residents to quality and appropriate health care. Continue to enhance rural women's access to health care. Seek to expand community health outreach, focusing on specific needs and preventative health care. To this end:

- Continue to emphasize training of medical personnel.
- Continue to target improved health care for rural women.
- Focus on rural priorities as expressed by rural residents.
- Focus on rehabilitating rural clinics.
- Focus on improving the quality of care provided.

Recommendation 5: Agriculture, Livestock, and Land Health. Recognize that landlessness is prominent and possibly increasing in rural areas. Seek to make the many incentives for poppy production available through other legal means or other crops. Conduct environmental assessments before introducing any large-scale livestock programs, and develop policies to promote long-term environmental recovery and health. To this end:

- Recognize that if landlessness is increasing, then programs that focus on agricultural production may exacerbate inequality within rural Afghan society and increase the poverty of rural Afghan laborers.
- Learn from the factors that make poppy production such an attractive livelihood option for rural Afghans, and use these lessons to help strengthen programs that promote alternative livelihood strategies.
- Find ways to counter the poppy trade that do not further endanger or impoverish small rural farmers or laborers.
- Support and conduct ecological and environmental assessments for large-scale livestock programs that focus on heavy browsers and grazers, such as goats and sheep.
- Support ecological and environmental assessments of land and water health to develop programs to counter desertification, soil erosion, and landslides and to enhance land health.

Recommendation 6: Strengthen Civil Society. Strengthen civil society in both urban and rural areas to facilitate the building of a strong citizenship and an active democracy that provides alternatives to fundamentalism and participation in armed political groups.

To this end:

- Counter abusive and predatory forms of governance by investments in building a strong and active civil society.
- Continue to support the work of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission as a means to further expand space for other legitimate civil society actors.

Recommendation 7: Strengthen the Formal and Informal Justice Systems.

Strengthen the formal justice systems that exist throughout Afghanistan, in particular the courts, the police, and detention centers. To this end:

- Establish a network of accredited law schools under the Ministry of Higher Education.
- Establish within the accredited law schools programs to train defense attorneys.
- Prioritize the expansion of legal clinics and workshop to the provincial levels with the aim of building professional capacity within the judicial sector.
- Establish and fund Special Family Courts, at least one in each province, to be administered and overseen by female judges to enable enhanced access for Afghan women to the formal legal system.
- Establish and fund Special Property Courts, at least one in each province, to handle property disputes.
- Increase the number of city district courts in major urban centers.

Enhance Afghan Citizens' Knowledge and Protection of Their Rights. To this end:

- Launch and support a public law awareness program using national radio and television to inform Afghan citizens about their legal rights and responsibilities.
- Nurture the democratic participation of rural Afghans within traditional systems of justice, prioritizing the development of women's councils and women's real and meaningful representation within *shuras* and *Jirgas*.
- Enhance and strengthen the space for civil society to develop democratic institutions that challenge fundamentalisms and armed political groups that rule by fear, intimidation, and patronage.

Work to develop a police force that is strong, just, and independent from the military and local and regional commanders and armed forces. To this end:

- Strongly support administrative reform in the police with a focus on dismantling the patron-client relationships within the current police forces.
- Establish police academies in each major urban center.
- Properly equip police stations and detention centers.
- Strengthen human rights training and accountability within the police forces.