



Overseas Development Institute

Humanitarian Policy Group

AGRICULTURAL REHABILITATION IN AFGHANISTAN:

**LINKING RELIEF, DEVELOPMENT
AND SUPPORT TO RURAL LIVELIHOODS**

CASE STUDY REPORT

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Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
CCP&PC	Chronic Conflict and Post Conflict
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation
GoA	Government of Afghanistan
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IFAD	International Fund for Agriculture and Development
LRRD	Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development
MAAH	Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry
MIWRE	Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resource Economy
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NDF	National Development Framework
NEEP	National Emergency Employment Programme
NPM	New Public Management
NRVA	National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment
UNODC	United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention
WFP	World Food Programme

Executive summary

This case study reviews the relationship between agricultural rehabilitation in Afghanistan and the livelihoods of rural Afghans. It analyses how rehabilitation modalities have taken into account continuing violence, the weakness of formal and informal institutions, unclear political legitimacy, large-scale population displacement, and the insecurity of economic investments. In Afghanistan, success in re-establishing a viable and licit rural economy is seen as essential. Failed rehabilitation, it is feared, could lead to the collapse of fledgling governmental institutions and the dominance of economic and political structures by the opium trade. Reinforcing rural livelihoods is therefore seen by many as constituting a justification for proceeding with strong commitments despite uncertainty about the quality and legitimacy of local power structures. The agricultural economy is expected to be a cornerstone in the eventual emergence of the ‘alternative livelihoods’ that the government and the international community have committed themselves to achieve to replace the war and opium economy that has prevailed in rural Afghanistan for so many years. This paper asks whether current approaches to agricultural rehabilitation have effectively contributed to these aims, whether this has been done while upholding basic humanitarian principles, and whether the Afghanistan experience suggests alternative frameworks for increasing the relevance of such efforts in other conflict contexts.

Both the Afghan government and the international community openly acknowledge that Afghanistan is in danger of becoming a ‘narco-mafia state’. A strong licit economy and a modestly well-functioning government have been presented as essential bulwarks to protect Afghanistan from again degenerating into a rogue and dangerous state, threatening its citizens and the world at large. Agricultural recovery has been portrayed as both the fundamental problem and the essential solution for Afghanistan. The recovery of poppy production is the primary threat, but it is at the same time acknowledged that alternatives to the illicit economy will primarily need to be found in agriculture.

Many observers claim that dramatic growth in agricultural productivity is feasible because productivity is currently so low. This is blamed on ‘traditional’ subsistence farming, which uses techniques that have remained ‘unchanged for centuries’. Images such as these stem from undercapitalised production systems and the appearance of village life, and are not based on an understanding of the historical processes that have created the current system. For much

of the past century, Afghanistan has had a strong, market-oriented agricultural system. Afghan farmers have been quick to adopt new varieties and, when weather conditions have been favourable, they have rapidly increased their production. Failure to appreciate and assess the dynamism of Afghan farmers has meant that the programmatic structure of agricultural rehabilitation and development does not reflect the actual nature of Afghan agriculture and processes of recovery in farming and livelihoods. The impact of conflict on agriculture has been incremental and primarily indirect. The gradual erosion of formal institutions, infrastructure and market structures, and the ample opportunities for predatory behaviour by local commanders, have had greater impact than bombs and bullets. Agriculture was, and in some ways still is, primarily constrained by a combination of drought, chronically weak governance and disrupted markets.

Problems in linking relief, rehabilitation and development are not just a reflection of weaknesses in conceptual frameworks. In Afghanistan, the agronomists who design and implement agricultural rehabilitation programmes focus on pragmatic concerns related to getting projects funded and implemented. They must transmit a simple, digestible message to donors; squeeze their interventions into inappropriately short-term funding windows; and implement demanding projects within the limited institutional capacity of implementing partners. Both humanitarian principles and developmental plans are seen by many agricultural rehabilitation practitioners as subjects to be discussed in other forums, as they struggle to get on with their work. Simplistic projects, though they may distract from the need for careful political judgement in aid programming amidst conflict, may also be a product of a much broader system that has difficulty handling more complex programmes than mere seeds and tools distributions.

Seed programming has had undue prominence in rehabilitation support. After the fall of the Taliban regime, plans were made for a major expansion of seed distributions in the ‘post-war’ phase. Agencies based in Pakistan planned their emergency and rehabilitation programmes with little first-hand information. They speculated that the drought and conflict had resulted in farmers ‘eating their seeds’. Massive distribution campaigns were mounted as soon as security conditions permitted. After they entered the country, agencies found widespread food insecurity, but little effort was made to accurately assess whether areas which were food insecure were also seed insecure. The ‘crisis narrative’, fuelled by easy access to donor resources, superseded accurate needs assessment. Today, with some exceptions, most actors

acknowledge that the initial assumptions of a seed access crisis after the fall of the Taliban regime were grossly exaggerated. Afghan farmers sought food from alternative sources in preference to consuming their seed stocks. If they lacked seed, they knew where they could get it, and the problem was more to do with accessing the investment capital to restart production, rather than a seed shortage *per se*. Large-scale seed distributions have nonetheless continued over the past two years, and are only now being scaled down. The justification for these programmes has gradually shifted away from addressing an absolute absence of seeds. Instead, seed aid is seen as important as a way to use existing institutional structures and experience to subsidise agricultural production, thereby accelerating recovery; and, because there is a perceived need to increase access to ‘improved’ seed, accelerating genetic renewal. Limited efforts have been made to anchor these aims in a broader analysis of how farmers obtain seeds, and how they are striving to access the far broader range of agricultural services that they need to restart and expand their production.

This is a key issue in making a link between seed aid and the wider agenda of rehabilitation and development. Diminished trust due to the legacy of conflict, current insecurity and the capricious nature of aid flows has prevented the emergence of a sufficient array of service providers to offer farmers with a choice of services in extension, input supply, veterinary care or credit. Weak public sector institutions and the power of local commanders make attempts to use legal mechanisms to hold service providers to account nearly impossible. Afghanistan’s mountainous topography, low literacy levels and lack of communications hinder the flow of information that is essential if farmers are to compare costs and monitor production prices. The questions of what should be delivered and by whom are at the centre of the debate on what kind of social contract the Afghan government intends to establish with its people, and the commitment of the aid community to help develop viable contract conditions.

Afghan policy documents stress that development should be led by the private sector. The private sector is expected to be capable of stimulating increased agricultural productivity, while not unduly burdening the limited capacities of a state that must rapidly move towards becoming ‘self-sustaining’. Although this broad idea is ostensibly agreed, there is less understanding of what this entails with respect to agricultural services. There are few ideas about how best to manage the transition beyond current structures, where public, private and NGO services are all patchy, of questionable quality, lack reliability and are not accountable to farmers. Institutional capacity-building in post-conflict situations tends to focus primarily

on rebuilding the capacity of the state to perform essential tasks. This seemingly self-evident priority becomes unclear in the agricultural sector, since agriculture is considered to be primarily a responsibility of non-state actors (the private sector and farmers' organisations). Decisions about which organisations should have their capacities built for the effective provision of which agricultural services are ideologically charged. For example, the decision to strengthen public sector extension or private commercial advisory services is directly related to wider plans for the role of the public sector. Actors defining the rehabilitation agenda are often forced to make choices that may profoundly influence longer-term development trajectories, even though the domestic political system that should be making such decisions is not yet firmly in place. Functioning input delivery services, market institutions and related information systems and agricultural research structures all need to be re-established rapidly, even though the political structures and bureaucracies that should in principle set policies for their design are weak and lack full democratic legitimacy.

These questions are not a major feature of the discourse on Afghan agriculture. A central aspect of the reconstruction and rehabilitation architecture in Afghanistan is the pressure to identify, build, create or strengthen 'implementing partners' – that is to say, formal *organisations* that can receive and utilise aid flows. This narrow focus distracts from the need to take into account the wider formal and informal *institutions* that farmers rely on to access capital, inputs, markets and knowledge in order to maintain their production, profitability and livelihoods. Among agencies in Afghanistan, there is a realisation that Afghan farmers will need stronger organisations in order to reduce transaction costs and engage with formal market institutions. However, this need has not been framed as a way of stimulating demand *per se*. Agricultural rehabilitation remains anchored in supply-driven service provision, as exemplified by seed provision. Virtually no agency would question the need for strengthening farmer organisations and civil society, but investment in the institutional infrastructure for stimulating demand is overshadowed by projects that lock local civil society into an aid management role. This is a key issue in defining where 'rehabilitation' fits between the humanitarian and development agendas, as a heavy-handed supply-side approach to working with local organisations is unlikely to create conditions for sustainable, market-led interventions. A failure to openly consider what the terms of engagement should be with civil society and farmers' organisations is an indication that the dynamics of the aid system are running counter to professed policy aims. Current agricultural rehabilitation programming tends to consist of collections of projects without clear exit strategies or links to longer-term

plans for agricultural reconstruction. There is no clear view about how rehabilitation will eventually be linked to Afghanistan's development as the short-term projects supported through humanitarian funding are by nature severely limited by their small scale, short timeframes and the difficulties that they present for effective coordination, sectoral balance and relevance to broader market imperatives. In lieu of a broad-based policy implementation process, programmes and projects have become a proxy for operationalisable policies.

Whereas agricultural services have a vital role to play in linking humanitarianism and development, there are also fundamental limits that must be considered in 'solving' Afghanistan's underlying rural problems through aid intervention. Principled support requires an awareness of where rehabilitation can create conditions for significant change (e.g., in agricultural services), and where it can do little (the social, political and economic power structures that limit the benefits poor rural Afghans can gain from farming). Sorting out what can and cannot be done demands seeing how rehabilitation programming can shift away from a focus on restoring the 'pre-disaster' situation. Effective linking of humanitarian and development assistance may be found in understanding how vulnerability has changed due to the conflict, changing international markets, demographic trends, environmental degradation and other factors, while also acknowledging that humanitarian and rehabilitation assistance are blunt tools with which to induce structural changes in rural development. The relative effectiveness of agricultural rehabilitation relies on awareness of the forces that create and reproduce poverty and conflict. A coherent policy framework for agricultural rehabilitation must therefore be cognisant of the context of past and potential future trajectories in poverty and rural development, and how Afghan farmers construct their livelihoods within these structural factors.

1. Background

1.1 Organisation of the case study

This case study reviews the relationship between agricultural rehabilitation in Afghanistan and the livelihoods of rural Afghans. It was undertaken as part of an ODI-led research project on ‘the changing roles of agricultural rehabilitation: linking relief, development and support to rural livelihoods’, focusing on chronic conflict and post-conflict situations.¹ The overall project aims to develop a greater level of conceptual clarity, and to identify practical strategies so that agricultural rehabilitation can contribute to linking humanitarian assistance and longer-term development in chronic conflict and post-conflict situations. Rehabilitation is often regarded as the process that links relief and development, but persistent challenges (both practical and conceptual) in the so-called ‘transition’ from relief to development indicate the need to develop greater clarity as to what rehabilitation ought to be about. This transition brings with it many risks, particularly where ‘durable disorder’ prevails in the form of continuing violence, the weakness or absence of formal and informal institutions, the lack of political legitimacy, large-scale population displacement and insecurity of economic investments.

Afghanistan experiences all of these. It is also a country where a failure to face these risks is seen to present even greater hazards. Failed rehabilitation, it is feared, could lead to the collapse of fledgling government institutions and the dominance of economic and political structures by the opium trade. The acute need to reinforce rural livelihoods is therefore seen by many as constituting a justification for proceeding with strong commitments despite uncertainty about the quality and legitimacy of local power structures. The agricultural economy is expected to be a cornerstone in the eventual emergence of the ‘alternative livelihoods’ that the government and the international community have committed themselves to achieving to replace the war and opium economy that has prevailed in rural Afghanistan for so many years. This paper asks whether current approaches to agricultural rehabilitation have effectively contributed to these aims, whether this has been done while upholding basic humanitarian principles, and whether the Afghanistan experience suggests alternative frameworks for increasing the relevance of such efforts in other similar contexts.

¹ This 13-month project is being undertaken in collaboration with the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) and the Rehabilitation and Humanitarian Policies Unit (TCER) of FAO, funded by the EC Poverty Reduction Effectiveness Programme. The specific objectives of the project are described in Annex 1.

This study begins by reviewing current perspectives on the role played by agriculture in Afghan rural livelihoods. Although agriculture is certainly the most important factor, it is not synonymous with rural livelihoods, which encompass a far wider variety of survival strategies. A clear distinction between rural livelihoods and the role of agriculture is particularly important since many assumptions about the ‘crisis’ that has affected rural Afghanistan have been based on inaccurate conceptions about the extent and nature of dependency on farming.

The next chapter reviews agricultural rehabilitation programming within the wider perspective of public sector reform and reconstruction. The resilience of interest in seed distributions is contrasted with broader visions for sector reform. The seemingly self-evident intention of linking relief and development raises complex political questions when the objectives of rehabilitation – addressing acute needs, food security, economic growth, structural reform and institutional sustainability – are vague and often conflated.

If this linking process is to be made more effective, the aims and means of supporting the development of the government, private sector and civil society need a clearer analytical framework. The following chapter reviews these different institutions’ capacities, goals and weaknesses in order to understand what is possible within the norms and trajectories of Afghan institutions themselves. This is contrasted with the norms of ‘new public management’ upon which much of the aid community has anchored its capacity-building and policy reform. This is presented as a background for finding more pragmatic approaches to linking with Afghan realities and for developing ownership.

Strengthening the institutional links between relief, rehabilitation and development will require a reassessment of the architecture of aid, including a critical look at the reasons why short-term projects still tend to displace efforts to channel aid flows so as to contribute to wider policy processes. The difficulties of maintaining humanitarian principles and the conundrum of aid actors taking upon themselves responsibility for the formation of political policy are stressed. The question is raised whether social protection can provide at least a partial conceptual basis for rebuilding the social contract between the Afghan government and its people, given the chronic nature of the conflict.

The study concludes by looking at why ostensibly discredited policy narratives retain their power over the agricultural rehabilitation agenda. The uncertainties facing Afghanistan have prevented many key stakeholders from living up to their public commitments to supporting the Afghan government, private sector and civil society to genuinely lead reconstruction and development. These uncertainties reflect genuine and relevant concerns, but nonetheless require firmer engagement and deeper understanding of the structures that define the risks and opportunities facing farmers, entrepreneurs, politicians and civil servants in the Afghan countryside.

1.2 Methods

This case study brings together the findings of interviews with government staff, local officials, NGO representatives, UN staff, technical advisors and rural Afghans. Data was collected in two missions to Afghanistan, on 2–20 September and 27 November–17 December 2003, when visits were made to Bamyan, Kunduz and Takhar Provinces. In Kabul, dialogue with the government focused on the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry (MAAH), which may have skewed findings somewhat. These missions were conducted in collaboration with the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), for which the author has prepared a separate broader study on Afghan agricultural policy (Christoplos, 2004). These short missions did not allow for extensive direct empirical observation of rural conditions. The views presented here represent a synthesis of the findings of available research and NGO studies, and are juxtaposed with the ‘policy narratives’ that clearly emerged in the interviews conducted in the course of the study.

A notable issue in assessing the validity of the data cited in this paper is the question of how much the phenomena described in empirical studies represent recent adaptation to conflict and drought, and how much they are anchored in long-established trends and a history of recurrent crises and recovery. In much of the discourse on the ‘crisis’ facing Afghanistan, it is unclear whether key factors are ‘new’ phenomena resulting from drought, changes in local power structures and the last few years of conflict, or if they are structural trends that have long affected the population and rural institutions.

There are major gaps in available data on the link between agricultural rehabilitation and livelihoods. Even before the conflict of the past three decades, statistics on rural population, economy and social conditions were extremely scarce (Pain & Goodhand, 2002). Despite

considerable investment in data collection, information remains extremely patchy, and the majority of studies available have had a very limited geographical and topical focus. Information on nutritional status in particular is largely anecdotal, or only valid for a limited area. Caution in extrapolating general observations from anecdotal studies is particularly important since the effects of conflict, natural disaster and even development over the past three decades have been diverse, episodic and localised (Pain, 2002).

1.3 Challenges in assessing the impact of agricultural rehabilitation on livelihoods

There is a dearth of analysis of the linkages between emergency and development interventions supporting Afghan agriculture. Little is known about the role and relative impact of different types of agricultural rehabilitation interventions, largely because of pressure in the aid system to demonstrate 'efficiency' in moving resources to beneficiaries, rather than looking at the impact of these resource transfers (Hofmann et al., 2004). Many agencies choose priorities based on what they see themselves as being good at, and what they expect will attract funding. In many cases, this means seed distribution. Other entry points into rural livelihood support require intervening in complex livelihoods systems. Agencies generally admit that they have limited understanding of the social, political and economic structures to which broader livelihood support would need to contribute. Alternatives are therefore seen as more difficult to fund, staff, organise and implement, even if the prospects for impact may be greater. Analytical rigour in assessing impact appears to conflict with procedures for the expeditious implementation of projects intended to achieve quick impacts. Infrastructure is constructed and rehabilitated without looking at by whom, how or even if the roads and canals are subsequently used. Demonstration farms are established without significant efforts to ensure that farmers visit and learn from them, or to see if the technologies being promoted have actually been adopted. Hundreds of revolving funds are created, with virtually no evaluation of whether they have actually revolved. This failure to learn encompasses seemingly obvious direct impacts on production and consumption, as well as equally important indirect impacts on labour markets and institutional development. Some agencies are beginning to recognise this gap (Reddick, 2003; Solidarités, 2003) and a few detailed surveys are being conducted of the impact of aid (FAO, 2003d), but pipeline pressures continue to deter critical analysis.

Another major reason for the lack of analysis of the impact of agricultural rehabilitation on livelihoods is the implicit assumption that increased production has a direct and positive

impact on wellbeing (Pain, 2002). Internationally, studies of livelihoods have shown that this is not necessarily true, particularly where local, entrenched power structures control surpluses. Entitlements, rather than production, govern relative wellbeing (Sen, 1999; Sen, 1981). Studies of opium production have shown that many poppy producers are not enjoying significant profits (i.e., entitlements) from this ostensibly lucrative crop (Mansfield, 2001), but there has been no similar analysis of the link between production and entitlements in other types of farming.

Similarly, in a period where rehabilitation is in focus, a key question related to the impact on chosen target groups concerns who controls the infrastructure that is being rehabilitated, especially irrigation. Access to irrigation water is in many cases dependent on ties to local (and in some instances national) political or military leaders. The capacity of aid agencies to investigate power structures is usually weak. Even if they are aware of how these structures affect access to water resources, they may have little capacity to exert pressure for the equitable distribution of benefits at community level, or to influence the multifarious social and political processes by which access to resources is negotiated.

1.4 Licit and illicit agricultural recovery in Afghanistan

Internal wars help to sustain predatory local political and economic systems through parallel markets, with entry controlled by elite groups. Statements by both the Afghan government and the international community acknowledge that Afghanistan is in danger of becoming locked into such a structure, often labelled a ‘narco-mafia state’. The key message presented to donors at a major conference in Berlin in April 2004 was that the country was facing an abyss, and that rapidly increased aid disbursements were required to reverse this trend. If stability is not achieved quickly, Afghanistan may be dragged back into a self-financing conflict. A strong licit economy and a modestly well-functioning government have been presented as essential to protect Afghanistan from again degenerating into a rogue and dangerous state, threatening its citizens and the world at large. Agricultural recovery has been portrayed as both the fundamental problem and the essential solution for Afghanistan. The recovery of poppy production is the primary threat, but it is at the same time acknowledged that alternatives to the illicit economy will primarily be found in agriculture.

Thus far, the experience of Afghan reconstruction since 2002 does not support this ‘either–or’ of a strong, healthy, licit economy, or the emergence of a ‘narco-mafia state’. Afghanistan has

developed both simultaneously. The predatory, exploitative and illicit nature of many local processes has not stopped a dynamic reconstruction process. Opium has probably generated far more investment capital for the licit private economy than has the aid community. Both the licit and illicit agricultural economies are booming. It is apparent that rural people have been rapidly increasing their production of wheat, poppies and other cash crops.

This has caught agricultural planners and programmers off-guard. A typical headline from early 2002 read ‘Country Could See Bulk of Food Needs Met within Five Years’ (Future Harvest, 2002).² A major multi-donor mission in 2002 suggested that ‘A realistic medium term target would be to return to 1992 levels of output within five years’ (ADB, 2002: 4). Headlines such as these reflect a flawed but implicit assumption that ‘we’ must rehabilitate Afghan agriculture. In 2003, Afghanistan’s cereal production was estimated to be one of the largest ever recorded (Favre, 2003a; FEWS Net, 2003). Other crops, such as potatoes and melons, have also been extraordinarily successful. Even fruit and nut orchards, popularly portrayed as devastated by years of conflict, are actually relatively young, with 58% having been planted over the past ten years (FAO, 2003c). The clearest conclusion is that our understanding of resilience is lacking. It is easier to predict losses than to understand how people pull together and reallocate their different assets to rebound in the wake of a crisis.

² The lack of faith in the resilience of Afghan agriculture was not universal. Tunwar writes that ‘Afghanistan can very quickly become self-sufficient in food again ... We should not take too gloomy an approach to the speed at which the country will achieve food security’ (2002: 2).

2. The role of agriculture in food security and livelihoods in Afghanistan

2.1 Securing Afghanistan's future through agriculture

International engagement in Afghan development is defined and justified in the declaration *Securing Afghanistan's Future* (2004), which was prepared for the Berlin donors' meeting in April 2004. This document stresses the 'centrality of the agriculture sector' for overall growth and for providing alternatives to opium production. These two goals are at the core of this strategy. Agriculture is seen not only as a way to improve the well-being of poor Afghans, but also as a way to stabilise state finances and reduce the current threat that illicit Afghan agriculture constitutes for other countries directly (by supplying narcotics) and indirectly (by financing terrorism).

Further dramatic growth in Afghan agriculture is described in *Securing Afghanistan's Future* as being eminently feasible due to low current levels of productivity. Many observers portray the Afghan agricultural economy as consisting of a 'traditional' subsistence-based system of isolated farmers using techniques that have remained 'unchanged for centuries'. Images such as these stem from the undercapitalised production systems and appearances of village life, rather than on an understanding of the historical processes that have created the current system. For much of the past century, Afghanistan has had a strong, market-oriented agricultural system. In the 1960s, it was one of the largest exporters of dried fruit (particularly raisins) and karakul lambskins in the world. This brought significant wealth to the north of the country. Massive development aid was invested in irrigated agriculture in the south, resulting in major changes in agricultural systems. Although far from all of these changes were positive for farmers and rural livelihoods, they have produced an agriculture that has more to do with adaptation to episodic development interventions, recurrent drought, periodic conflict and the regional politico-economic situation, than it has to do with 'tradition'. Productivity increase is thus not just a matter of diffusing 'modern' technologies, but involves addressing the risks and opportunities facing farmers, traders and other stakeholders in the rural economy.

2.2 The impact of conflict on subsistence and market production

In order to understand resilience in the face of conflict, it is essential to step back and reassess basic assumptions about how conflict impacts on agricultural production, consumption and markets. Afghan agricultural production has been affected by conflict in the following ways:

- insecurity has prevented labourers, input providers and traders from accessing farms at key times in the production cycle;
- expanding urban populations due to displacement have affected market demands and intensified peri-urban production, thus competing with rural producers who have experienced increasing transport costs;
- changing household composition (due to death, abduction, displacement or migration) has modified gender roles, reduced family labour and in some cases increased access to remittances;
- the loss or depletion of financial assets has limited access to agricultural inputs;
- displacement has forced some farmers to abandon their farms and/or production output altogether;
- the children of displaced farmers have grown up without learning about farming;
- access to land, labour and other inputs has been limited in places of refuge;
- agricultural outputs have been forcibly extorted by warlords and local militia;
- access to land and irrigation resources has been subject to unchecked control by warlords and local power brokers;
- formal input delivery systems have ceased to function;
- formal quality control, regulatory and phytosanitary institutions have ceased to function;
- changes in the local economy (either related to conflict or relief food supply) may have contributed to rendering staple food production unprofitable (though other crops may have become more profitable);
- destruction of common property resources (most notably pistachio forests) has decreased production of crops that have had an important safety-net function for landless farmers in particular;
- displacement of the pastoral population from grazing land has depleted livestock production and prevented their recovery after the drought; and
- over-exploitation of certain land areas may have long-term negative consequences for the natural resource base.

Despite these hazards, Afghan agricultural production has, on the whole, fared surprisingly well. Under the Taliban during the latter half of the 1990s, before the onset of drought, agricultural production was recovering rapidly. Both horticulture and cereal production were

increasing, and farmers were experiencing a modicum of stability despite the destruction of physical and institutional infrastructure. The drought at the end of the 1990s reversed this recovery. Direct disaggregated attribution of the subsequent disruption of agricultural systems to drought and conflict respectively is impossible, but most research shows the drought as having relatively greater impact (Lautze et al., 2002).

Box 1: Political and natural hazards facing Afghan agriculture

Afghanistan has long been affected by a variety of natural disasters and complex political emergencies. In addition to the conflicts of the past 30 years, Afghanistan has been hit by devastating droughts and earthquakes, as well as floods, sandstorms and other natural hazards. This makes it difficult to draw clear conclusions about the causes of human suffering and the risks that face a farming household.

Over the last decade, the humanitarian community has made efforts to shift away from the ‘natural disaster paradigm’, wherein conflict-related disasters were perceived as being time-bound occurrences that could be addressed without reference to the deep-seated political and economic factors that caused the disaster. While many essential lessons have been learnt, skills are still lacking in assessing the interplay of risks from natural hazards and conflict, especially in agricultural rehabilitation. Drought, floods and other hazards impact on local relations between farmers, landlords and warlords. War may attract greater attention, and the conflict may remain chronic, but the return of rains or destruction of irrigation canals due to floods may have more impact on how farmers are trying to get on with their lives. The traditional tools of natural disaster response are in many ways relevant, even though they need to be placed within a far broader understanding of the political and economic factors that frame livelihood decisions (Buchanan-Smith & Christoplos, 2004).

While the effects of the conflict are primarily detrimental, the virtual collapse of formal trade and high transport costs have served to protect Afghan producers from declining terms of trade in international markets. With the coming of peace and stability, improved access, security and infrastructure are leading to sharply reduced transport costs, thereby enhancing the competitive advantage of neighbouring countries in the Afghan domestic market, particularly for wheat. Wheat accounts for 80% of Afghanistan’s production on irrigated land, and it is estimated that, in an open market, much of this production will be unprofitable (GoA,

2004b). This suggests that a major shift of land use to higher-value crops will be absolutely imperative in the post-conflict phase. Such a shift will, however, be difficult since poor storage, processing and quality control will continue to limit access by Afghan producers to commercial markets.

Internationally, it is increasingly acknowledged that conflict has a much more multifaceted impact on production than has in the past been assumed. Some markets (seeds, for example) remain surprisingly resilient, and other ‘obnoxious markets’ (Kanbur, 2001) such as narcotics and other contraband thrive amid weak formal institutions. There may be surprisingly little impact on food markets, as has been shown by the extraordinary stability of local wheat prices relative to urban wages and international market prices in Afghanistan (Maletta, 2002). Some producers have retreated to subsistence production, while others have invested in illicit crops that can more easily be grown in the absence of formal authority. Furthermore, changing markets and market opportunities do not always follow conventional assumptions about the stage of conflict in a given country. The massive expansion of poppy production *after* the fall of the Taliban is a clear example of this.

The belief that increased food security is best achieved by production increase rests on an underlying assumption that Afghanistan’s farmers are primarily subsistence farmers, i.e., people who will eat more if they produce more. A ‘crisis narrative’ depicts the livelihoods of these ‘subsistence farmers’ as having recently gone through a severe but temporary disruption. Current strategies to access wages and cash are not seen to be ‘normal’. The drought of 1999–2002 almost certainly caused a far greater temporary reliance on cash (rather than subsistence production) due to the failure of food crops. The reliance on a cash economy has continued as farmers struggle to repay debts to traders incurred during the drought (Lautze et al., 2002). In the search for cash income, household labour resources have increasingly been shifted to opium production. This may further lock families into the cash economy as they must purchase more food while they devote available labour to poppy (Mansfield, 2002). It is unclear, however, how much poppy production has actually diverted labour away from other crops. The spectacular increases in opium production in recent years have occurred in parallel to increased production of cereals and other cash crops.

There is little consensus about whether food security interventions in Afghanistan should strive to re-establish pre-drought/war subsistence production patterns. Although some (Lautze

et al., 2002) stress that the drought was a highly exceptional event that disrupted and caused long-term damage to former subsistence-focused livelihood strategies, others (Pain & Goodhand, 2002) draw attention to the major role that diversified livelihood strategies, including migration and commercial production, have historically played in the Afghan economy. The majority of Afghan farmers are net consumers (GoA, 2004b), whose food security depends, even in a good year, on access to an array of livelihood strategies. Subsistence production may be a cornerstone of livelihood strategies, but it is not sufficient as a guarantee for survival. Widespread landlessness also suggests that the resilience of the most vulnerable sectors of the population will not be dependent on the recovery of subsistence agriculture, but rather on labour markets or the availability of appropriately targeted social protection programmes (for many women and the disabled who may not be able to gain full access to labour markets). Landless and near-landless Afghans are generally resigned to the need to search for labour opportunities and do not expect a major change in their circumstances (Alden Wily, 2004). Alternative survival strategies have long been pursued in response to new opportunities, climatic variability and conflict. Whereas Lautze et al. describe pre-drought social structures as reflecting a certain socio-economic equilibrium, most other observers present a different historical picture, where livelihood shocks leading to indebtedness and reinforcement of exploitive 'feudal' structures have been episodic throughout Afghanistan's history (Alden Wily, 2004; Mansfield, 2002).

2.3 The impact of conflict on consumption

Although most agricultural development programmes are premised on the idea that increasing farmers' incomes will indirectly improve nutrition and food security, many commentators have argued that increasing incomes is not enough (Marek, 1992) and that interventions need to address consumption concerns more directly. Hunger has substantial economic costs for individuals, families and whole societies. Labour, often the only asset of the poor, is devalued for the hungry. Mental and physical health is compromised by lack of food, cutting productivity, output and the wages that people earn. Chronically hungry people cannot accumulate the financial or human capital that would allow them to escape poverty. Hunger has an inter-generational dimension, with undernourished mothers giving birth to underweight children (IFAD, 2001; WFP, 1998; FAO, 2002). Arguably, nutrition (as the engine of labour productivity and creativity) is just as important as technical inputs (Bonnard, 2001).

Even though a ‘crisis narrative’ has dominated Afghan agricultural rehabilitation over the past two years, there is a surprising dearth of information about whether the spectacular increase in food production has actually had a consequent impact on consumption. Information about nutritional levels is patchy, and data that can be correlated with the prevalence of conflict is completely absent. What data is available has consistently shown surprisingly low levels of acute malnutrition, paired with very high levels of chronic and micronutrient malnutrition, both during and after the drought. This suggests that coping strategies have provided for the most basic survival needs under very high levels of stress. Repeated shocks create a situation of chronic vulnerability. Over 50% of children under five are estimated to be chronically malnourished (WFP, 2003). Acute malnutrition appears to be primarily a seasonal problem during the summer, and is related to diarrhoeal diseases rather than food shortage. Low levels of acute malnutrition have been interpreted as suggesting highly equitable distribution of food within the household. High rates of micronutrient malnutrition (and scurvy) point to the importance of dietary habits, and possibly food preservation and post-harvest practices, rather than aggregate cereal production *per se*. There is very little consumption of fruit and vegetables during the winter months.

It is unclear how Afghan farmers are themselves acting to address nutritional concerns, and how much nutritional deficiencies can be attributed to the conflict. With regard to horticulture, for example, the land area used had, before the drought, significantly increased during the conflict years (FAO, 2003c), despite the collapse of most export markets for these commodities. This investment in horticulture was obviously for home consumption, a finding that is a cause for concern for those observers who see Afghanistan’s future economic stability as depending partially on regaining former markets. It is evident that weather, rather than conflict or markets, has been the primary constraint on horticultural production.

Despite the popular conception that agricultural interventions (particularly emergency programmes) should address food security, these findings on the crucial need for diversification of diets have had little impact upon rehabilitation programming priorities. ‘Hunger’ is still used as a justification for the distribution of wheat seeds, and most fruit and vegetable production initiatives are primarily promoted for income generation, rather than consumption. Some NGOs are pursuing home gardening and other programmes intended to have an impact on household consumption, but there are very few post-harvest and food processing projects that could address seasonal micronutrient deficiencies.

2.4 The impact of conflict on markets for products and services

In the international debate on rebuilding institutional capacities in the midst of complex political emergencies, attention on the role of agricultural services has generally focused on the relevance of specific project interventions. While these findings are useful from a project management perspective, little is revealed about wider impacts on the service markets into which these projects would be expected to contribute. Anecdotal accounts exist of relatively positive experiences regarding para-veterinary services (Ostrom, 1997; Sauvinet-Bedouin & Erikson, 2001). There has been more analysis of the potentials and pitfalls in introducing microfinance in chronic conflict and post-conflict contexts (Wilson, 2002). Methods have been developed for the analysis of seed markets (Longley & Sperling, 2002), but the findings of these studies have yet to be applied on a broad scale in project planning and design. In Afghanistan, analyses of agricultural service markets and how they have been affected by the conflict (or by aid) are virtually non-existent.

Agricultural services include seed supply, veterinary services, credit, extension, business development services, processing and marketing. Regardless of the context, the impact of any single service intervention is related to the availability of other complementary services. The ultimate measure of the quality of service provision cannot be found in individual credit, input or extension interventions. It is in how farmers can access the mix of services that they need. Extension may be useless without access to the genetic material that is being recommended or the credit with which to purchase new inputs. Even in pure development contexts, the aid landscape is littered with failures to achieve objectives due to a failure to place projects within the wider range of services that a farmer needs to obtain capital and seeds, plough fields, harvest and process crops, develop a marketing strategy, transport crops to market and provide products of the quality, bulk quantities and timeliness that the market demands. There are very few analyses of how rural people use the piecemeal interventions that inevitably characterise rehabilitation programming within their wider livelihood strategies, and how they draw down the array of services that they need in the midst of conflict.

The failure to take a broad perspective on agricultural services is perhaps due to differences between this sector and others such as health or education, where a limited array of service providers can be expected to become engaged, and where the state can be expected to eventually play a major role in regulating, financing and (perhaps) delivering public services. In agricultural services a greater proportion of the services in question relate to private goods.

There are therefore strong arguments against investing in developing state service capacity in order to retain space for the private sector to develop. This assumes, however, that in the absence of a strong public sector private capital will be attracted to the resulting market opportunities. Such assumptions are questionable in most chronic conflict and post-conflict contexts, where the risks for private investment are great. Competition from the public sector may be the least of the pitfalls facing potential private service providers.

A combination of insecurity, uncertainty, weak formal institutions and destruction of physical infrastructure results in Afghan farmers, traders and aid agencies experiencing extraordinarily high transaction costs in accessing services. Indeed, it was largely the public frustration and anger over the unacceptably high transaction costs imposed by local commanders that caused the Taliban to coalesce in 1994, and which helped sweep them to power (Pain & Goodhand, 2002). Diminished trust due to the legacy of conflict, current insecurity or the capricious nature of aid flows has prevented the emergence of a sufficient array of service providers to offer farmers a choice. Weak public sector institutions and the continued power of local commanders make attempts to use legal mechanisms to hold service providers to account nearly impossible. Afghanistan's mountainous topography, low literacy levels and lack of communications hinder the flow of information that is essential to enable farmers to compare costs and monitor production prices. Interviews with farmers show that they are furious that they are unable to trust the reliability of the inputs they receive from the private sector and NGOs.

Input provision is perhaps the area of most concern for farmers. Fertilisers, pesticides, seeds and veterinary medicines are widely available in markets. Farmers in isolated areas experience high costs in transporting inputs. Others are primarily concerned about the low quality of inputs and their inability to obtain redress when they perceive that the inputs they have purchased are of poor quality. Similar complaints are expressed about poor-quality seed provided by NGOs, particularly the 'hit and run' distributions of the emergency phase. Farmers' interest in extension partly derives from a need for help in choosing appropriate inputs from the market, and also a hope that the state will reassume a role in providing standardised and subsidised inputs. Provincial and district agricultural staff recognise the importance of monitoring and regulating private sector and NGO input provision, but they have no capacity to perform such tasks.

Box 2: Patron–client relations and the role of rehabilitation interventions

Poor farmers throughout the world strive to enhance their access services by allying themselves with patrons who either provide those services directly, or arrange for these services from others. The costs of entering into these relationships may be high and even exploitative, but a near-destitute farmer usually looks first at what is left for the family to survive on, rather than the costs (Scott, 1976). Various studies in Afghanistan have pointed out that access to credit is highly dependent on ties to patrons (Mansfield, 2001; Alden Wily, 2004). Even services such as ploughing (Allen, 1999) are easier to access where strong ties to a patron exist.

There is a tendency within the aid community to see sharecropping and other patron–client relationships as purely a source of exploitation. One study points out that ‘Not a single landlord was praised as being kind, generous or fair, and the farmers do not expect them to be’ (Alden Wily, 2004: 67). Poor poppy farmers become trapped in cycles of increasing debt bondage and destitution as they rely on patrons for credit, advice, inputs and other services. While certainly often extractive, patron–client relationships are also the most viable way that many farmers see to lower (or at least stabilise) their transaction costs. In commercially integrated areas where competition exists for attracting clients, the integration of service provision has the potential to bring down transaction costs. It is in the interest of the patron, for example, to ensure that inputs are of high quality and that farmgate prices are high when profits are divided with sharecroppers. Landlords are in many ways more accountable to their tenants for the quality of inputs that they provide than aid agencies, whose presence is dependent on short-term contracts. The competition between (and accountability of) landlords may even be growing as increasing wages make local and migrant labour a more attractive livelihood strategy relative to sharecropping.

The revolutionary reforms introduced during 1978–79 were intended to break patron–client ties and replace them by more ‘modern’ agricultural services. The result was catastrophic. Institutional ties were disrupted, while new structures failed to fill the resulting gap. Given the limited reach, duration and institutional capacities of current agricultural rehabilitation and development programming, attempts to replace these relationships with greater independence may not be feasible or desirable now either. Dependence on an exploitative landlord has clear

advantages over dependence on an NGO with a six-month contract, or a government with virtually no capacity to cover its recurrent costs. Replacing an exploitative but functioning social system with one that relies on institutions that have yet to be created is a high-risk strategy, and it is rural Afghans that will bear such risks.

Credit is a service with high transaction costs where aid programming is making initial inroads in replacing what are perceived as exploitative and inefficient informal sector services. The quality of services provided informally varies greatly, and is intertwined with wider patron–client relationships. Interest may or may not be charged. Patrons earn their profits through other aspects of their relationships with clients, such as taking a larger profit margin in their payment for crops. Microfinance efforts are expanding rapidly. Aid programming varies from extremely soft credits from NGOs at farm level (often repayment for seed distributions) to the recent licensing of First MicroFinance Bank, supported by the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development. In the long run, microfinance has a potential for significant impact. In the short run, rural Afghanistan is unlikely to experience a ‘microfinance revolution’ due to the high costs of establishing institutional infrastructure in the countryside.

Successful service provision structures are characterised by integration. Wealthy farmers may be able to scan the market and choose service providers. Their buying power may even enable them to hold service providers to account. Poorer farmers lack the connections, time and capital to attract and combine services. They therefore suffer from far higher relative transaction costs. This is one reason why they are particularly attracted to informal interlocked systems of extension, finance, marketing and input provision, such as that frequently provided by traders for poppy production.

The majority of the aid community still takes a piecemeal approach to service provision, but there are notable exceptions. USAID and some other agencies are starting to invest in value (or commodity) chain initiatives, bringing together producers, traders, processors and other service providers involved in the development of commercial products. By looking at the entire chain related to a given commodity, it is hoped that bottlenecks that result in prohibitive transaction costs can be identified and addressed. One of the first hurdles that must be overcome in such an approach is to find a way of creating greater trust among these different actors. This is not easy even in ‘normal’ development contexts, and is particularly difficult

where key stakeholders are not confident that they can resort to formal legal mechanisms if agreements are not upheld. Pashtu traders are important in rural Afghan service markets, but do not trust local or national governmental and judicial structures to treat them fairly and equitably (ICG, 2003). International experience with investing in commodity chains has shown considerable success in stimulating economic development, but in many cases have also highlighted the inability of poorer farmers to attain the rapidly rising standards of quality, quantity and timeliness of production that commercial markets demand. The actors in the commodity chain must trust that their erstwhile colleagues will fulfil their commitments, and they often doubt the capacity of poor farmers to do so.

Box 3: Transcending the yeoman farmer fallacy: lessons from agricultural development

Internationally, there is a growing shift in rural development thinking away from what has been called the ‘yeoman farmer fallacy’, a belief that virtually all rural people strive (and should strive) to alleviate their poverty through increased or more effective investment in their own household farms. Instead, there is a realisation that a growing majority of the rural poor earn most of their income outside of the homestead farm, and that in coming years most of the poorest half of the rural population will be effectively landless (Ashley & Maxwell, 2001). Ellis & Biggs write: ‘If a new paradigm of rural development is to emerge, it will be one in which agriculture takes its place along with a host of other actual and potential rural and non-rural activities that are important to the construction of viable rural livelihoods, without undue preference given to farming as the unique solution to rural poverty’ (2001: 445). Agriculture may still be an important ‘engine’ of development, but the poor will primarily benefit (if they benefit at all) through (a) non-farm jobs as profits from agriculture are reinvested in other businesses, (b) by working on large farms, or (c) access to cheaper foodstuffs. Optimists expect that non-farm rural employment will create multiplier effects through ‘a chain of increased demand and incomes that cascades through the hands of poor people’ (World Bank, 2003b: 88). Others are less sanguine, noting that these alternatives to farming represent desperate efforts to survive, that rarely provide an escape from poverty (Bryceson, 2000). Subsistence production will remain an important coping strategy, especially in isolated areas that are poorly integrated into international markets, but will represent a shrinking proportion of household assets and investment.

The yeoman farmer fallacy continues to permeate much Afghan agricultural rehabilitation policy and programming. Food security interventions are particularly prone to an implicit reliance on this fallacy, as cereal production is (often falsely) assumed to have a direct impact on consumption among vulnerable people. Conventional seed distributions, for example, implicitly assume that agricultural rehabilitation for disaster-affected rural populations is synonymous with helping small, own-account farmers to re-establish their family farms. These ‘yeoman farmers’ may be a major target group, but they are not the only – or necessarily the most vulnerable – group of rural people reliant on agricultural production. A livelihoods approach to agricultural rehabilitation requires transcending the yeoman farmer fallacy and addressing the complexity of how rural people ‘hustle’ to survive.

Improved support to food security is reliant on ensuring that programming is more cognisant of how labour markets interact with the agricultural economy in rural livelihoods. Some data collection efforts, such as the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA), are shifting their focus away from cereal production, to better reflect the importance of labour in livelihoods. AREU's livelihoods monitoring project is also providing a more solid basis for understanding the ways that Afghan livelihoods are (and are not) dependent on smallholder production (Grace & Pain, 2004).

2.5 Rural livelihood rehabilitation: beyond agriculture

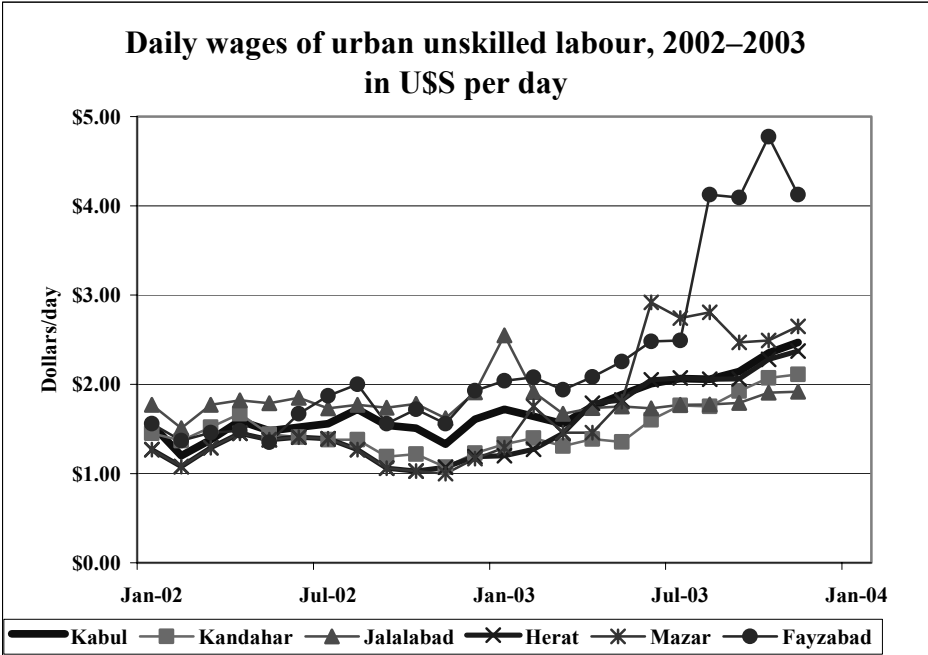
One of the narratives in chronic conflict and post-conflict contexts is the assumption that conflict reverses normal development trends by wreaking havoc on markets. Vulnerable people are thought to retreat towards subsistence as best they can. There is no sign of this happening in Afghanistan. Labour markets in the cities and in poppy production are of increasing importance. The conflict and drought have resulted in an increased shift to reliance on wage labour as farmers struggle to obtain cash to pay off debts and regain access to land that has been mortgaged to creditors. It has been estimated that 65% of farming families depend heavily on off-farm income (ADB, 2002).

After the fall of the Taliban, many observers feared that labour markets would be swamped by the massive return of refugees and internally-displaced people (IDPs). These fears have proved unwarranted. The reintegration of an estimated 2.5 million returned refugees and 600,000 IDPs has occurred without significant disruption of labour markets. The opium and construction booms, as well as the revival of cash crops and the rapid expansion of labour-intensive infrastructure rehabilitation projects, have all provided employment opportunities.

During the height of the drought, the urban service sector provided a vital source of income for those affected (Pain & Goodhand, 2002). Surveys shortly after the fall of the Taliban suggested that labour markets were weakening, and that purchasing power was falling (Lautze et al., 2003). It is clear that the picture is now more positive, with strong demand and rising wages in many urban and peri-urban areas (Maletta, 2002; Maletta, 2003 (see Figure 1)). In the past, migration to neighbouring countries was preferred over domestic employment because wages were higher, but there are initial indications that cities in Afghanistan are becoming a more attractive option due to the lower transportation costs and because people

are able to return home more regularly (Wilson & Pain, 2003). The popular conception of urban labour as being a relatively risky and perilous survival strategy can be disputed. Terms of trade between wages and wheat in Kabul have been remarkably constant over the years (Maletta, 2002), suggesting that, compared with Afghanistan’s other high-risk survival strategies, urban wage labour is a relatively secure livelihood option.

Figure 1



(from Maletta, 2003)

There are significant geographic and seasonal variations in the interplay between agriculture and rural labour markets. In isolated areas with very small land holdings, there is a relatively small market for labour. In more accessible areas, such as near Herat, labour markets have long been reported to be strong (Allen, 1999), and local officials have been concerned that IDP camps could act as a (subsidised) magnet for seasonal labour migrants, providing free food and shelter and thereby distorting normal migration patterns (Christoplos, 2002). Near Kabul, there are many reports of unmet demand for labour in peri-urban agriculture, particular at harvest time. The demand for semi-skilled labour for the opium harvest is assumed to be the greatest factor in rural labour markets, with reports of wages as high as \$15 per day for skilled harvesters. Wheat farmers in Badakhshan have complained of increasing labour costs due to the expansion of poppy production (Molla, 2003). Farmers in Kunduz express similar

concerns. There are reports that it is becoming difficult to find sharecroppers in the main poppy growing areas since the profits from daily wage labour are perceived to be more reliable (Coke, 2004). Very remote areas with little demand for wage labour have not experienced such inflationary pressures. In Hazarajat, for example, agencies involved in contracting labour for infrastructure rehabilitation report some inter-agency competition due to wage differentials, but no pressure on wages from alternative agricultural wage labour.

Although it is Afghanistan's main commercial agricultural crop, opium is grown on just one percent of the arable land, or less than three percent of the irrigated land area (UNODC/GoA, 2003). It absorbs over eight times the labour input per unit of land as wheat (Mansfield, 2001). This suggests that the link between agriculture and livelihoods is not a matter of how farmers decide to use their land, but rather how rural people, landed and landless, use their labour. Nonetheless, there is still a tendency to focus on the farm as the unit for analysis of the rural economy, which distracts attention from how rural households relate to the agricultural economy beyond the farm (see Pain, 2002).³

Gender is also a central factor in labour markets, though not always in the ways that are commonly assumed. Empirical research is showing that there is a great diversity in women's access to income-generating opportunities across different ethnic groups, wealth status and other variables (Kerr-Wilson & Pain, 2003). Women gain a large proportion of their income from non-agricultural activities, though very poor women depend to a large degree on agriculture (Maletta, 2003b). It is unclear whether women would benefit more from subsistence production or from enhanced opportunities for paid employment in processing. Some women, widows in particular, who own land but lack capacity for heavy agricultural tasks, arrange to have sharecroppers farm their land while they seek alternative employment. Women are very much involved in processing activities, such as cleaning and preparing seed and fruit. Increased investment in seed enterprises and food processing will (if successful) impact greatly on the demand for these tasks. It is unclear if this will reduce employment opportunities or give women a greater opportunity to engage in potentially more profitable or otherwise more valued activities. This would seem to be an important issue to monitor in the future.

³ One example of this is the UNODC/Afghan government Opium Survey 2003, which refers to the population for which opium production has a 'direct role' in their livelihoods as only based on the number of farming households growing opium on their own land, thereby ignoring the impact of opium on migrant labourers and the indirect impacts on wages and prices created by the opium economy.

Expanded agricultural production will lead to expanded trade, which in itself is a major source of employment. Especially in many border areas, portage and petty trade, both often connected to smuggling, have long provided important, though high-risk, labour opportunities (Kreutzmann, 2003). The Kuchi ethnic group in particular have traditionally been involved in trans-border trading and transport (Pain & Goodhand, 2002), as well as domestic trade (Weijer, 2002). Pastoralism has been combined with other ways of benefiting from mobility, with transhumant livestock production being only one component of Kuchi livelihoods. The relative importance of pastoralism itself in Kuchi livelihoods has varied considerably over the years (Weijer, 2002; Rubin, 1995).

Studies of Afghan political, social and cultural structures inevitably stress the gulf between rural and urban areas, especially between rural areas and Kabul. This divide is commonly described as being at the core of virtually all conflict over the past century. Without disputing the validity of these theories for illustrating the tensions in Afghan society, analysis of livelihoods draws attention to relations that bridge this dichotomy.

An overall understanding of labour markets indicates that, both in terms of securing livelihoods and stimulating economic growth, labour force mobility is in many respects a highly positive factor. This runs counter to the views and stated objective of many NGOs in 'helping people to stay in their villages'. With the exception of pastoralism, migration is seen by many agencies and some researchers (Lautze et al., 2003) as a symptom of failed livelihoods, not as a solution to inherently weak local subsistence and market economies. The assumption that migration is inevitably and inherently 'bad' distorts priorities and underpins fixed-package programming that takes farming to be the norm (Kerr-Wilson & Pain, 2003).

It is not clear how rural Afghans perceive their 'choice' of whether or not to migrate. Some observers see the decision to migrate as usually being an act of desperation, which should not be portrayed as a 'choice'. Others point to the clear preference of many returning refugees for urban resettlement as evidence that rural livelihoods are becoming seen as less desirable (Jamal & Stigter, 2002). The decision of the majority of returning refugees to settle in urban areas indicates a response to several factors:

- loss of land and other assets that make rural livelihoods unviable;
- preference for continued urban lifestyles by returning refugees;
- increased exposure to urban livelihoods, including skills development; and
- shortage of off-farm employment in isolated rural areas, ruling out a gradual re-accumulation of assets through rural livelihoods alone.

It is very difficult to get an overview of the extent to which migrant remittances have supported different rural livelihood strategies. Remittances are said to account for up to \$1 billion annually (Pain & Goodhand, 2002). There is no reliable data on the use of these assets, but they appear to be primarily going to subsistence. Returning refugees are also usually reported to use their savings for consumption during their period of reintegration, and only rarely for direct investment in production.

Even among those agencies and observers who recognise the importance of migration for rural livelihoods, there are few plans for supporting these efforts. There are some mentions of the need for skills training for migration (Kerr-Wilson & Pain, 2003), and other suggestions for investment in post and telecommunications to facilitate remittance (Semple, 1998). Others have pointed out that the informal mechanisms, such as the *hawala* money exchange system, actually support migration quite well, and that encouraging formalisation in order to prevent uncontrolled international financial transfers (as was done in Somalia) could severely damage this important livelihood strategy (Maimbo, 2003).

3. Linking relief, rehabilitation and development in Afghan agriculture

3.1 The ‘crisis narrative’ and aid priorities

The failure to appreciate and assess the dynamism of Afghan farmers has meant that the programmatic structure of agricultural rehabilitation and development efforts has fallen out of step with the actual nature of Afghan agriculture and the processes of recovery in farming and livelihoods. The central reason that the aid agenda is out of step with the realities of agricultural production and livelihoods is that a ‘crisis narrative’ shapes aid response. The history of intermittent coping, recovery and destruction of the past 25 years is glossed over by media images of systemic breakdown. Under the Taliban, before the beginning of the drought in the late 1990s, cereal production was recovering well, and in 1995 livestock numbers were greater than they were in the mid-1960s (Italtrend, 2003). The lessons of these past recovery processes are rarely alluded to, much less analysed, in current planning efforts. Similarly, the ingenuity of farmers in experimenting with new production methods and markets is ignored in the face of efforts to raise funds and deliver supplies to beneficiaries who are assumed to ‘have nothing’. There are several assumptions that steer programming decisions. Agricultural rehabilitation is generally expected to relate to the linking of relief and development in several key ways:

- it is seen to fill a gap between food aid and the renewed production of food;
- agriculture is seen to be at the core of rural identity, values and dignity, and as such is essential in mending the social fabric that has been damaged during years of conflict;
- farming is seen to be the engine of rural (and perhaps even national) growth, and is therefore a pre-eminent priority for restarting the development process;
- farmers’ organisations are assumed to be one of the most important institutional platforms for civil society to regain its rightful role in defining development priorities and re-establishing commercial relationships; and
- given the importance of the private sector and civil society in agricultural development, the ability and willingness of the government to find an ‘appropriate’ role *vis-à-vis* these other actors is seen to be a litmus test of its readiness to assume the modest and realistic role currently allocated to the facilitating and regulating state in mainstream development thinking.

These five narratives define the contours of agricultural rehabilitation in Afghanistan. Their limitations and inherent distortions as justifications for agricultural development are becoming apparent, but as yet no alternative development narrative has emerged. Internationally, the humanitarian sector has created a counter-narrative to these ‘developmentalist’ narratives due to concerns that a rush into developmental relief risks running roughshod over humanitarian ethics and principles, in particular:

- ‘Developmentalism’ assumes a linear and (unrealistically) rapid normalisation of the crisis, and therefore encourages actors to ignore acute needs, such as the nutritional needs of large sectors of the rural population who are too destitute to benefit in the short to medium term from production strategies.
- ‘Developmentalist’ strategies require a major investment in governmental, private sector and civil society institutions through building their capacities and/or through using them to channel resources to farmers. Since all of these institutions have inevitably been involved in the conflict in one way or another, such engagement runs the risk of overriding principles of neutrality and impartiality during a phase when there is still a prevalence of armed conflict and a significant likelihood that the situation may fall back into full-scale war.
- Pressures to achieve ‘coherence’ between humanitarian and development agendas may lead to humanitarian needs being ignored (to avoid dependency) and may make it difficult for humanitarian agencies to act independently of political actors.
- The *de facto* decision of most agencies in Afghanistan to work within the National Development Framework (NDF) and in collaboration with the government is seen as the primary reason for the deteriorating security situation, where even those agencies that attempt to maintain strict independence and neutrality are targeted for attack. It is implicitly assumed that access to ‘no-go’ areas would be much better if the humanitarian community had maintained a greater distance from the development agenda.
- Over-optimistic assumptions that modest aid inputs (such as a seed distribution) can make a significant contribution to peace-building may result in a wider gap between rhetoric and reality in aid programming and a further detachment from frank analysis of the impacts of aid on livelihoods, social relations and the political economy of the conflict.

Failure to live up to the aims of linking relief, rehabilitation and development is not just a reflection of weaknesses in conceptual frameworks and the absence of consensus on ethical frameworks. In Afghanistan, the agronomists who design and implement agricultural rehabilitation programming are primarily focused on getting projects funded and implemented. They must get a simple, digestible message across to donors; squeeze their interventions into inappropriately short-term funding windows; and implement demanding projects within the limited institutional capacity of implementing partners. Both humanitarian principles and developmental aspirations are seen by many agricultural rehabilitation practitioners as something to be discussed in other forums as they struggle to get on with their work. Narrow technical approaches are virtually inevitable. Simplistic projects may distract from the need for careful political judgement in aid programming amidst conflict, but may also be a product of a much broader system that lacks capacity to handle more complex programmes than mere seeds and tools distributions.

To complicate matters further, Afghanistan is a patchwork of different areas with different forms of conflict and development. It is impossible to predict just how chronic the conflict will turn out to be in a given province. It is therefore also impossible to predict how essential it is to maintain a readiness to ‘retreat’ into a humanitarian mode, or how optimistic one should be about development goals such as ‘achieving double-digit growth’. Engaging with the government, private sector and civil society carries risks, but a refusal to engage entails significant costs. With hindsight, one can criticise over-optimistic expectations over the past decade that Southern Sudan or Somalia would enter a ‘development path’, but great progress has been made in Nicaragua, Cambodia and Mozambique. A failure to invest in rehabilitation might well have led to failure in these countries (Christoplos, 2000). Many danger signs remain in Afghanistan, but a failure to encourage the strengthening of rural service structures could discourage those working to rebuild trust in the future.

3.2 Agricultural rehabilitation and New Public Management

Although the debate on the relief–development continuum is not a major concern of actors in agricultural rehabilitation in Afghanistan, the debate over the role of the state most definitely is. Afghanistan’s NDF states that ‘The people’s aspirations must be represented and reflected in an accountable government that delivers value on a daily basis’. The questions of what should be delivered and by whom are at the centre of the debate around what kind of social

contract the Afghan government intends to establish with its people, and the commitment of the aid community to help develop viable contract conditions.

The NDF specifies that ‘We do not see government as the producer and manager of the economy, but as regulator and promoter of the entrepreneurial energies of the people. The state will enter into a direct managerial role only when social justice demands its presence’. This implies that the policy formation process should essentially consist of a gradual bridging of gaps in different interpretations of what constitutes a public good; i.e., where the state could or should step in, and where the market and civil society can be expected to take the lead, requiring only facilitation and regulation from the state. In many respects, this is precisely what is happening in Afghanistan, even though a comprehensive consensus is not yet in place.

Within the NDF, Afghanistan’s crisis has been conceptualised as an opportunity for reform, as this New Public Management⁴ (NPM)-inspired structure has been overlaid on the remains of what was unduly assumed to be a collapsed state. The formal endorsement of the NPM approach is widely perceived to be more a product of donor pressure than the result of domestic commitment. The continuing opposition to NPM in the government has revealed that the state was not as collapsed as many expected (or hoped?). A set of problems has emerged in implementing the framework, as the state and civil service have proven to be surprisingly vigorous and active in striving to rebuild (rather than reform) structures of the past. There is intense pride in the civil service (AREU, 2004) that does not mesh well with the radical NPM paradigm. Agricultural stakeholders expect and want the state ‘to provide everything!!’ (Hemani, 2003). The belief that crisis inevitably creates opportunities for public sector reform has been built more on prevailing narratives within the aid community than on empirical realities. Most Afghan politicians and civil servants have a different set of prerogatives, based on a different history and culture than their advisors, and a different set of political, economic and social pressures.

⁴ ‘New Public Management’ refers to the models for attempting to minimise the role of the state and increase the role of the private sector and civil society that were implemented widely in Europe during the 1980s, and have since been increasingly promoted as part of structural adjustment programmes in the South and East. More recently these ideas have gained favour in the design of international strategies for rebuilding ‘failed’ or ‘collapsed’ states.

The view that Afghanistan's crisis can be used to encourage reform may also be out of step with political processes in contexts of post- and chronic crisis more generally. Boin and 't Hart point out that the narrative of crisis as an opportunity for reform is widespread in the North as well, but is profoundly flawed as 'the requirements of crisis management are inherently incompatible with the requisites for effective reform' (2003: 545; see also Christoplos, 2000). Citizens' expectations and other factors put pressures on political leaders (and in this case the aid community as well) to show quick results and provide visible public services. This is out of step with NPM models, which suggest that the gap between government capacity and massive need can be used as a stimulus for greater reliance on the private sector and civil society. The credibility of the state and the aid community relies on them providing concrete and visible responses to acute needs.

3.3 Seed aid: from relief to technology transfer⁵

Part of the narrative of linking relief, rehabilitation and development is the belief that the phasing out of food aid, through its replacement with seed aid, is a necessary step in the transition towards more developmental approaches to food security. Seed aid is generally regarded as being more cost-effective than food aid due to the smaller quantities of inputs supposedly required.⁶ Not only is seed aid cheaper than food aid, it is also thought to reduce dependency, thus providing the basis for longer-term rehabilitation and sustainability. Based on these justifications, 'seeds and tools' interventions have become so preponderant over the last decade that they have been referred to as a 'treadmill' (Remington et al., 2002).

Afghanistan represents a classic example of the treadmill tendency. Support was given to seed programming throughout the 1990s. At the end of 2001, plans were made for a major expansion of distributions in the 'post-war' phase, to address what were assumed to be serious levels of 'seed insecurity' (see, e.g., Grünewald, 2001). Agencies based in Pakistan planned their emergency and rehabilitation programmes with little first-hand information. They speculated that the drought and conflict had resulted in farmers 'eating their seeds'. Massive distribution campaigns were quickly mounted as soon as security conditions permitted. After agencies were able to (re-)enter the country, they found widespread food insecurity, but little

⁵ The findings here reflect a 'snapshot' of the role of seed aid which is (hopefully) changing rapidly as new and more innovative programmes come on line. Most larger agencies, such as FAO, have already shifted the majority of their portfolios away from seed programming.

⁶ In the case of maize, for example, it is theoretically possible for farmers to produce about 100 MT of grain from 1 MT of seed; it is clearly cheaper to supply 1 MT of seed than 100 MT of food.

effort was made to accurately assess whether areas which were food insecure were also seed insecure. The ‘crisis narrative’, fuelled by easy access to donor resources, superseded accurate needs assessment.

Today, with some exceptions, most actors acknowledge that the initial assumptions of a seed access crisis after the fall of the Taliban regime were grossly exaggerated. Afghan farmers (like farmers everywhere) sought food from alternative sources in preference to consuming their seed stocks. If they lacked seed, they knew where they could get it, and the problem was more one of generally accessing the investment capital to restart their production, rather than a seed shortage *per se*. Large-scale seed distributions have nonetheless continued over the past two years, and are only now being scaled down. The justification for these programmes has gradually shifted from addressing an absolute absence of seeds. Instead, seed aid is seen as important for two reasons. First, seed aid is a way to use existing institutional structures and experience to subsidise⁷ agricultural production, thereby accelerating recovery. Second, there is a perceived need to increase access to ‘improved’ varieties. Success in this latter objective has been exceptional (and was so even during the Taliban regime). In interviews agency staff have proudly declared that, in some areas, local varieties have disappeared entirely, a tendency that is disturbing for those who see a value in retaining Afghanistan’s extraordinary and unique genetic diversity.

These two justifications for seed aid – subsidisation and technology transfer – are both relevant in many respects. The wider question regarding the choice of instruments for agricultural rehabilitation is whether the menu of interventions is congruent with the nature of the challenges that rural people face in re-establishing their livelihoods. While there is certainly a place for seed aid in Afghan agricultural rehabilitation, it has retained a greater role than would seem appropriate. Even where far broader needs have been identified in surveys and feasibility studies, seeds still account for the bulk of what many farmers get. This appears to be due to three factors:

- the legacy of humanitarian and early rehabilitation programming, where seed was perceived to be the only feasible form of intervention (among many NGOs);

⁷ The term ‘subsidy’ is almost never explicitly used in aid and agricultural policy discussions given its associations with weak sustainability. There is, however, general agreement that Afghan farmers need an injection of capital (i.e., a subsidy) to increase their production.

- adaptation to the institutional weaknesses that have made other types of activities difficult to establish; and
- continued difficulties in accessing longer-term funding for other activities.

Particularly given the sensitivities around providing ‘agricultural subsidies’, seed distributions are primarily promoted as a way to press new technologies on ignorant farmers. Some agencies specifically target farmers who commit to following instructions from extension. This naturally filters out farmers who do not have the resources with which to follow extension advice, or who do not believe that extension advice is relevant to their conditions. Agricultural officers from most agencies interviewed stressed the primary importance of changing the attitudes of villagers. It is thus the behaviour of the villagers, rather than the conditions in which they survive, that is seen to constrain livelihoods. One agency reported using a ‘yield gap’ approach, i.e., looking for ways to ensure that farmers can reduce the ‘gap’ between on-farm and research station results with a given variety. Such approaches have been largely discredited internationally for their failure to take into account on-farm realities and for a failure to acknowledge that maximum yields may not be optimally profitable for producers who have little chance of replicating the highly controlled environmental conditions found in research stations. Many households also pursue livelihood strategies that stress priorities other than yield maximisation, such as sending their children to school rather than applying more labour to agricultural production.⁸

Although most new seed varieties have been tested on a national basis, local trials and demonstrations are rare in Afghanistan. This stems from the near-collapse of national research capacity and a tendency to give priority to input distribution, rather than ensuring that seeds are appropriate for local conditions. Many proposals and plans call for widespread use of demonstration trials, tied to extension activities, but when compared to the massive provision

⁸ One evaluation observes: ‘However, there is a strong impression that the technical components of the agriculture sector take priority over the social or participatory elements. Much of the extension programme is handled as an issue of technical delivery rather than as a process of developing farmers’ knowledge and motivation. The seed programme specifically targets what are called ‘progressive’ or ‘pioneer’ farmers. On-farm trials are described in the strategy as participatory technology development processes. However they appear to only systematically record and report biological yield. There is very limited documentation of the criteria that farmers might use to evaluate trials. Most of the on-farm trials focus either on new variety introductions or classic agronomist management concerns (seed rates, fertility levels). No evidence of systematic analysis of farmers’ practices or their management decisions was found. The extension programme bears all the signs of being designed by extension workers to provide what they think farmers need to know’ (Kempenaar et al., 2002: 17).

of inputs, there is little evidence of matching activities on the ground to help farmers assess and learn about the new varieties that they are receiving. The concentration on input distribution has drained limited human resources from needed extension activities (Solidarités, 2003). Adaptive trials and participatory extension methods (such as farmer field schools) have not been used on a significant scale due to this skewed resource prioritisation, and because substantial strengthening of the skills of field staff would be required. Such institutional strengthening is difficult to achieve within the structures for emergency programming, where ‘impact’ on production must often be demonstrated within six months to one year.

The ethics of mass introduction of new varieties in lieu of a considerable level of on-farm trials and demonstrations deserve critical attention. These changes in farming systems lead to increased risk, especially where blanket recommendations are made in regions with diverse micro-climates. Farmers do not know how or where seed has been tested. Surveys have shown that farmers appreciate the need for both high seed quality and access to new varieties (FAO, 2003d). They are also quite vocal in expressing dissatisfaction when inappropriate varieties have been distributed, and when agencies have demonstrated a lack of capacity/commitment to ensuring that the seeds distributed are appropriate for their microclimate and soil conditions. This is particularly important where imported varieties are being distributed. In interviews with farmers, researchers, programme officers and extension staff, anger was repeatedly expressed regarding a case where donor pressures led to distribution of French seed that had been inadequately tested in Afghanistan.

Some agencies have engaged in ‘hit-and-run’ seed distributions, by making free distributions in a given area and then withdrawing. This unaccountable behaviour is underpinned by the technology transfer ethic. If the scientists are automatically assumed to know best, follow-up and downward accountability to farmers are not required. Even in better programmes, the limited opportunity for farmers to observe and consider the appropriateness of the technologies that they receive before planting highlights the limited accountability of those providing agricultural support. Most implementing agencies allocate virtually no funds for investigating the extent to which farmers are able to make informed decisions about the value of seeds they receive. If the seed programmes across Afghanistan are largely intended to induce ‘technology transfer’, this would seem to imply that extension advice regarding

fertiliser applications, suitability for different soils, etc., would be more than a useful addition to distributions. Extension advice would seem to be a responsibility of those agencies providing seed, since new varieties often require changes in planting depth, watering requirements and fertiliser use. A failure to provide extension can easily lead to failed harvests, failed transfer of technology and failed livelihoods. A point of particular note with regard to the accountability of technology transfer efforts is that a 'normal' extension service needs to retain the confidence of its clients if it is to achieve its targets in the future. It cannot risk alienating its clients by recommending inappropriate inputs and then leaving. Aid agencies are by nature relatively free from accountability to those that they ostensibly serve (see Martens et al., 2002). Furthermore, the combination of technology transfer efforts with investment in community infrastructure means that farmers feel themselves to be under pressure to keep quiet about their dissatisfaction with the technology that has been transferred to them to avoid antagonising their NGO patrons and endangering access to larger investments in other sectors.

3.4 Market-based and demand-driven modalities for agricultural services

Afghan policy documents, such as the NDF and *Securing Afghanistan's Future*, stress that development should be private sector-led. The private sector is expected to be capable of generating an internal dynamism that will stimulate increased agricultural productivity while not unduly burdening the limited capacities of a state that must rapidly move towards becoming 'self-sustaining'. Although this broad vision is ostensibly agreed upon, there is less understanding of what this entails with respect to agricultural services. There are three contrasting perspectives among different stakeholders:

- The state must regain a strong role in agricultural service provision, as it will take many years for the private sector to become a major and reliable service provider and since the quality and accountability of the NGO service providers is poor (a view primarily adhered to by the civil service).
- Neither the government nor the private sector has the capacity to expand significantly, so to ensure rapid recovery it is better that the NGOs remain the primary channels for service provision, together with their partners in local civil society (a view primarily adhered to by the NGOs).
- Neither the government nor the NGOs are capable of mustering a sufficient level of services to enable agricultural production to develop rapidly, so the private sector

should be stimulated to expand by provision of targeted support and creation of a level playing field for competition (a view primarily adhered to by bilateral and multilateral development agencies).

None of these three perspectives stems from a considered analysis of what the current market is for agricultural services, where it can be facilitated, where it must be regulated and where demands for public goods suggest that it should be complemented by public/NGO service provision or the use of public resources for contracting of subsidised services. Visions exist, but there are few ideas about how best to manage the transition from current structures, where public, private and NGO services are all patchy, of questionable quality, lack reliability and are not accountable to farmers. Market-based approaches designed to stimulate demand would seem to be an essential way forward, albeit not a panacea.

Market-based approaches fall into two overlapping categories. Some are intended to create an enabling environment for the private sector to expand. Other approaches aim to address (post-emergency) poverty and destitution by putting resources (cash or vouchers) to contract services into the hands of *beneficiaries*, in the hope that they will then become *clients* or even *customers* of emerging service providers. The market is expected to ensure that enterprises selling food, seeds or agricultural advice become accountable to their customers and provide services that are more in tune with the needs of their clients. These private service providers are expected to be inherently more accountable to those they serve than aid agencies, which are by nature primarily accountable to donors.

The underlying assumptions that a free market for services will lead to improved quality, relevance and accessibility for poor ‘customers’ through enhanced accountability has been questioned. Bebbington and Sotomayor (1998) have pointed out that subsidies channelled through voucher schemes do not necessarily provide clients with a greater choice of agricultural service providers. The expectation that the poor can express their ‘voice’ through ‘exiting’ from being the clients of sub-standard service providers assumes that they have information about the quality of services that are being offered, that there are equally accessible alternative service providers and that the service providers have sufficient information about the needs and desires of their potential clients (Lepenies, 2004). Even in ‘normal’ development contexts these assumptions have been questioned.

The use of market-based approaches for improving the response to complex emergencies remains under-researched and inadequately understood. Hopes that the power of the market can be harnessed to solve humanitarian crises and support livelihoods have sometimes superseded empirical analyses of how service provision markets function in the midst of chronic conflict. There are also dangers that the promotion of market-based modalities may give legitimacy to a hasty withdrawal of the state from rural service provision (or a failure to ensure that the state returns in post-conflict contexts), without due attention to whether or not other actors are emerging to fill the gap (Rocha and Christoplos, 2001; Pearce, 1999), and whether or not the state is capable of fulfilling even a minimal regulatory role. In Afghanistan there is clearly a lively market for many agricultural services (at least in relatively accessible areas), but little is known about whom this market serves and on what terms. Voucher schemes and other market-based methods are intended to address ‘market imperfections’, but in an overwhelmingly imperfect market, such as that facing a poor and isolated Afghan farmer, the need to start with a clear and (ideologically) unobstructed view of the prevailing market must precede the design of solutions.

In Afghanistan, experimentation with market-based approaches is at an early stage. NGOs and the government provide the vast majority of aid and public sector-financed services. Both ‘NGOist’ and ‘statist’ services are supply-driven and lack a ‘customer’ or demand-driven orientation. Neither includes accountability mechanisms or elements of competition. This problem has been recognised in *Securing Afghanistan’s Future*, where calls are made to ‘level the playing field’ within and beyond these ‘twin public sectors’ (GoA, 2004: 17) of NGOs and the government. Nonetheless, thus far few evaluations, assessments and plans assess the possible or actual impact of investment in either of the ‘twin public sectors’ on private sector development.⁹ In the past, the nature of the crisis was said to justify a supply-driven approach to ensure that services reached farmers despite the vacuum in service provision markets. Today, this conceptual gap is in growing contrast to declarations about the importance of private sector-led development. Little attention is paid to the dangers of NGO programming crowding out private service providers by upsetting the establishment of a ‘level playing field’ for commercial competition. Even where the private sector is given priority, the desire to demonstrate ‘quick impact’ encourages the provision of large and presumably very soft loans

⁹ One notable exception is Kempenaar et al., 2002.

to a limited group of selected entrepreneurs, presumably at the cost of further damage to the 'playing field' within the private sector itself.

The strength of the private sector in contributing to poverty alleviation through commercialisation and processing services will presumably be demonstrated through the emergence of businesses that endeavour to sell services such as, for example, drip irrigation systems, post-harvest storage facilities or transport (see Heierli, 2000). Through the USAID-funded RAMP, support is being considered for 'food processing incubators' in order to support fledgling enterprises. The largest engagement with the private sector is in seed production where, despite some setbacks to the search for a viable market relationship during the emergency phase, renewed and serious attention is being paid to redefining farmers as customers rather than beneficiaries. Current thinking within FAO indicates that a commercially viable seed system will require far more attention on how to actively market the product, and a realisation that, due to small margins between seed and grain prices, wheat seed is unlikely to provide a commercially viable base for a seed enterprise. Higher-value products, such as vegetable seed, must be part of an eventual marketing strategy. It should be stressed, however, that although FAO is discussing these ideas with its MAAH counterparts at central levels, seed enterprises and NGOs continue to plan levels of seed production according to government targets and donor promises of procurement, with little attention to whether or not farmers want to buy the seeds produced. The result has been that only half of the seed produced by FAO's implementing partners has been resold to farmers.

Distrust of the private sector stems from the perception that, since agriculture is the foundation of rural livelihoods, great caution is needed in turning over responsibility to private actors that are poorly understood and therefore unpredictable. Informal discussions reveal a tendency among many observers to assume that a market orientation will inevitably lead the private sector towards (rather than away from) opium production, as it is the most profitable business opportunity. The inclination to see agro-industrial investment as a choice between licit and illicit products may distract from an analysis of actual capital flows and opportunities. The majority of financial flows in agriculture are in one way or another linked to the opium trade. The search for 'alternatives' in private sector development may therefore entail finding ways to encourage *diversification* in the reinvestment of opium profits into other businesses, rather than as an 'either-or' choice between licit and illicit agriculture. There are indications that wealth does encourage diversification out of poppies. In Helmand,

the province with the largest production of opium, poppies are primarily concentrated in those districts with small, scattered land holdings, with uncertain access to irrigation (Mansfield, 2001). Farmers that can afford better land have chosen other, lower-risk investment priorities. Concerns about the country descending into narcotics-financed anarchy are not anchored in an understanding of the political economy of how ‘mafias’ choose their investments. As their risks increase (as they hopefully will as the Afghan state becomes consolidated and as policing capacity increases), the opium traders and the farmers who supply them will probably incrementally shift their investment into other businesses. A major unanswered question is whether aid can be used to speed up this process and to influence these risk management decisions.

3.5 Programming for livelihoods and alternative livelihoods

It is a paradox that the commodity which has been most successfully organised according to prevailing plans for private sector-led agricultural development is the commodity that all key stakeholders are most committed to eradicating. Opium production has expanded dramatically in the absence of state (or aid) support. Knowledge about poppy production is being spread to areas where farmers have never produced opium before through purely private extension efforts. A comprehensive system of credit and input supply has emerged, and processors have invested greatly in processing and transport. The opium economy has proven that the visions of private sector-led agricultural development are feasible if there are opportunities for significant and stable profits.

Opium production is discouraged, of course. Eradication efforts have varied in intensity and method over the years. Currently, there is consensus that opium eradication will only be successful on a wide scale if alternative livelihoods are created. There is also a consensus that some form of integrated approach is necessary, combining interdiction with the promotion of alternatives. Views differ, however, regarding the appropriate balance that should be employed. In other countries, interdiction has been far more heavy-handed. Widespread aerial spraying has been used in Colombia, for example, with devastating effects on agricultural livelihoods and probably public health (Vargas, 2004). Such drastic measures have yet to be employed in Afghanistan, where it is feared that they would weaken the legitimacy of the state and possibly spark insurrection among commanders weakly committed to supporting the governing coalition. There are also worries that an abrupt reduction of opium production would severely decapitalise the Afghan economy, in which opium provided 23% of GDP in

2002. The result is that drastic eradication efforts have not been mounted, despite growing impatience with the slow progress achieved thus far.

There is currently no clear differentiation between the modalities of ‘alternative livelihoods’ programmes and other livelihood promotion efforts. The distinction is that, in regular livelihoods programming, sustained improvement in the well-being of rural people is the primary objective. In alternative livelihoods programming, improved well-being is merely a means to achieve goals that are first and foremost related to national stability and the interests of donor countries. The National Drug Control Strategy for Afghanistan makes no reference to benefits accruing to producers. It has sometimes been acknowledged that the alternatives on offer will directly result in *reduced* well-being for ‘beneficiaries’, but that this will be offset by the indirect benefits of living in a stable and peaceful state.

Some have suggested that the correlation between chronic conflict and illicit drug production represents an unpleasant but inherent aspect of modern globalisation, wherein transnational trading networks and local warlords are interconnected and interdependent (Duffield, 2000). Given the impact of such trading networks within donor countries themselves, those working with alternative livelihoods have been more attuned to these transnational perspectives than their colleagues dealing with rehabilitation. Alternative livelihood policies stress political and economic challenges and coherent approaches to conflict reduction, such as the need for great care in combining policing measures with efforts to promote ‘empowerment’ (see, e.g., Feldafing Declaration, 2002; Gebert & Rerkasem, 2001). It is widely recognised that alternative development must confront deeply rooted patron–client relations and complex agricultural labour markets (Mansfield, 1999).

The primary obstacle to constructive discourse on alternative livelihoods is the widespread assumption that opium is such a profitable product for all those involved in its production, processing and marketing that they are unlikely to be receptive to any alternatives unless they are faced with the direct destruction of their crops. There are, however, other risks that may make alternative livelihoods more attractive, as evidenced by the fact that, despite the massive expansion of opium production, the majority of Afghan farmers still choose not to plant poppies (Mansfield, 2001). Poppy is a high-risk crop for several reasons (in addition to the obvious risks stemming from interdiction programmes). It requires very large labour inputs, which may not be available if the family loses capacity due to illness or other unforeseen

events. Many of the farmers who are currently raising poppies have limited experience with the crop, and have experienced major losses as a result. A virus heavily affected poppy in southern Afghanistan in 2003. Most poppy farmers try to spread their risks by devoting only a small proportion of their land area to poppy. The proportion of wheat to poppy usually increases or decreases with the relative size of the land holding (the less land the greater the proportion of poppy to wheat), but usually 50% or more of irrigated land will be sown to wheat and other crops. The instinct to protect domestic food security is very strong throughout Afghanistan (Fitzherbert, 2003: 39–40, cited in Maletta, 2003a: 26).

3.6 Rights, protection and vulnerability amid chronic conflict

Thus far, this study has emphasised the relationship between agricultural rehabilitation programming and livelihoods. Many aid agencies do not see livelihood support as an end in itself. Instead, livelihoods are primarily promoted as a means to achieve the ultimate objective of protecting human, social and economic rights. If livelihood opportunities are created, agencies can be said to live up to their ethical obligations to ensure that people can survive with dignity in a more effective manner than through mere provision of relief supplies. Sen takes this concept further when he proclaims that development is not simply about growth, but also the capability (right) to choose one's livelihood strategy (1999).

Although many agencies working with agricultural rehabilitation in Afghanistan have formally proclaimed their adherence to 'rights-based approaches', there is as yet little indication that this has resulted in significant changes in operational methods, priorities or goals. One reason for this is that rights-based programming would in many cases inevitably require confronting powerful local commanders and elites. Some agencies have indicated a readiness to assume limited responsibilities regarding the protection of communities from the worst abuses inherent in these power structures. The extent of this commitment is, however, constrained by capacities to intervene in the structural causes of these human rights abuses. A genuine effort to bring rights into the agricultural rehabilitation agenda would inevitably mean addressing issues such as land and resource tenure. Progress is being made in mapping the extent and urgency of these challenges (Alden Wily, 2004), but there is as yet little indication that this has made a considerable impact on programming priorities. This issue appears to be too difficult and is beyond the operational scope of humanitarian and rehabilitation interventions.

One limitation concerns building consensus regarding who bears the obligations of ensuring that a given set of rights is upheld. International humanitarian law is based on the assumption that sovereign states are the ultimate duty bearers. Since the Afghan state is still not capable of upholding these duties in much of the countryside, there is therefore a clear mandate for others to act as duty holders in humanitarian response. This is complicated, however, in that humanitarian assistance accounts for a small and shrinking proportion of aid in Afghanistan. There is no ‘international rehabilitation law’ to guide decisions about who should or could assume responsibilities when relief is no longer appropriate, but where the state remains weak and where international agencies can at best muster only a limited and uneven collection of basic services for assistance and protection.

Particularly in a chronic/post-conflict milieu, the ‘vulnerability context’ of the livelihoods framework would seem to provide a useful set of warning signals that there is a risk that rights may be abused. In Afghanistan, the vulnerability context is an ephemeral factor in agricultural programming, and in many cases it is absent altogether. Some agencies are developing new vulnerability assessment methods, but this study encountered no evidence that they have significantly impacted on field level programming. The risks that a given vulnerable person may face are rarely specified in project documents. Little attention is given to identifying what ‘vulnerable groups’ are vulnerable to. The structure of rehabilitation assistance reinforces this tendency. When risks such as chronic conflict, profound indebtedness or insecure land and resource tenure remain unspecified, it becomes easier to imagine that short-term programming might succeed in ‘solving the problem’. Comprehensive risk and vulnerability analyses would expose the deep structural nature of the challenges facing the landless and destitute, and thereby demonstrate the limited extent to which modest project interventions can modify the context of their vulnerability. This is not to imply that these interventions are not without significant benefit, but rather that there is a lack of transparency about their palliative nature. Again, given that most agencies claim to have left the ‘humanitarian phase’, it would seem important to be transparent about what other principles and rights are guiding interventions.

In many documents, the term ‘vulnerability’ is followed by the word ‘groups’. The labelling of vulnerable groups is a device to link data on shortage of assets to the selection of target beneficiaries and the choice of items to be distributed. The ‘identification of vulnerable groups’ thus tends to decontextualise poverty and reconstitute the poor as beneficiaries rather

than people struggling to manage complex livelihoods. The detachment of the focus on identifying vulnerable groups from a deeper analysis of the nature of vulnerability itself has meant that community development efforts have failed to address the complexity of rural poverty. The fixed service packages that dominate emergency and rehabilitation programming are an insufficient response to the needs of many of the intended beneficiaries. The diverse topography of many regions, with different microclimates, uneven market access and the varied impact of the conflict on specific villages, has meant that even neighbouring villages may have very different vulnerability profiles (Kerr-Wilson & Pain, 2003; Alden Wily, 2004), and may therefore require different ‘packages’. Standard categories of vulnerable groups, such as children or the disabled, say little about what is either possible for them, or desired by them. The tendency to classify all women as vulnerable glosses over the extraordinary diversity in the agricultural activities that women are allowed to perform, even in a small geographic area (Kerr-Wilson & Pain, 2003).

Box 4: Vulnerability and seed programming

Many critics of seed programming in Afghanistan complain that ‘targeting is a joke’. They question the commitment, capacity and conceptual frameworks that are needed in order to reach so-called vulnerable groups. Despite a major survey conducted by FAO, there is little information available about which households within a given community receive seeds; who actually benefits from eventual production increases; and who is able to actively participate in the different rotating funds that are said to be established with resources generated by seed distributions.

Despite a variety of guidelines, there is clearly no consensus or joint understanding regarding if or how different seed distribution modalities should or could be used to target specific beneficiaries in different ways. Most agencies involved in agricultural rehabilitation are formal signatories to the agreement on ‘Guiding Principles Governing the Production, Distribution and Import of Seed and Planting Material of Field Crops in Afghanistan’ (FAO, 2003). Interviews indicate that their field staff, however, are largely unaware of these guidelines and develop modalities based on their own distribution targets, agency objectives and local interpretations of FAO’s regulatory framework. Little or no effort is made to assess how beneficiaries themselves interpret the array of seed banks, in-kind repayment, cash payment and soft credits that are used in these schemes.

The Guiding Principles prohibit free distributions, but many suspect that the actual levels of repayment for seeds distributed are low. Some agencies present elaborate procedures for collecting seed back from farmers after harvest. Others acknowledge that this rarely actually happens. It is not clear who (if anyone) is legally responsible for ensuring that loans are repaid and how the concept of ‘vulnerability’ is used to steer different cost-recovery mechanisms. One high-level agency representative states that, in the current structure, ‘there is no accountability and you give a free hand to the commanders’.

The link between seed distributions and land ownership is central to any expectation that seed can support ‘vulnerable groups’. It is unclear whether free/subsidised seed enables sharecroppers to negotiate better agreements with landlords. It is doubtful that it does, given that cereal seed only accounts for 6–12% of input costs. Most informants question whether sharecroppers are able to negotiate better terms, and assume that their benefits will only come from increased production due to higher-quality seeds.

4. Institutions

4.1 Formal and informal institutions: aid imperatives, political conundrums and farming realities

Institutional capacity-building in post-conflict situations tends to focus on rebuilding the capacity of the state to perform essential tasks. This seemingly self-evident priority becomes ambiguous in the agricultural sector, since agriculture is considered to be primarily a responsibility of non-state actors (the private sector and farmers' organisations). Decisions about which organisations should have their capacities built for the effective provision of which agricultural services are ideologically charged. For example, the decision to strengthen public sector extension or private commercial advisory services is directly related to wider expectations regarding the role of the public sector. Actors defining the rehabilitation agenda are often forced to make choices that may profoundly influence longer-term development trajectories, even though the domestic political system that should be making such decisions is not yet firmly in place. Functioning input provision, marketing structures and related information systems, and agricultural research, all need to be re-established rapidly, even though the political structures and bureaucracies that should in principle set policies for their design are weak and lack full democratic legitimacy.

One might suppose that there would be a lively debate underway among those promoting alternative NPM, grass-roots and state-led development models when designing agricultural rehabilitation programmes. Such is not the case. Instead, this seemingly central policy conundrum is heavily overshadowed by pressures to identify, build, create or strengthen 'implementing partners', that is to say the formal *organisations* that can receive and utilise aid flows. This narrow, short-term focus distracts from the need to engage in the wider, long-term policy issues that frame perspectives on the formal and informal *institutions* that farmers rely on to access capital, inputs, markets and knowledge in order to maintain their production, profitability and livelihoods.

The formal institutional infrastructure of Afghan agriculture is extremely weak. Re-attracting large-scale private investment in storage, processing, transport and other services precludes rapid renewal of links to former (and potential new) international markets. During the course of the conflict, domestic institutional capacity diminished at the same time as international market demands greatly increased. If Afghan dried apricots, for example, are to be

reintroduced on a major scale in international markets, their production must be predictable, of standardised quality, timely and in bulk quantities, all of which require formal institutions. Private investment capital will only address these problems of licit agricultural enterprise if entrepreneurs perceive that they are part of a broad re-emergence of agro-industry. The physical repairs to cotton gins and raisin-drying facilities that are often discussed in rehabilitation planning are insufficient for stimulating a leap back into export markets. New, stronger and more flexible institutions are a prerequisite to such investment, including:

- formal trading networks;
- finance;
- processing and storage;
- market information;
- access to advice and inputs for new technologies; and
- formal security of tenure.

Pressures to channel aid flows are by nature biased by assumptions that the revival of agricultural production can only be achieved through the re-establishment of formal institutions for input supply and credit. While formal institutions are essential, they are not the ‘only solution’. The areas of engagement with the private sector specified in *Securing Afghanistan’s Future* make no mention of the informal sector. Although aid agencies need relatively formal institutional counterparts, farmers have less stringent demands. Experience in Pakistani cotton farming has shown that informal structures can actually provide high-quality agricultural services, and even create effective links to the formal sector (Smith et al., 1999). Some surprisingly strong informal Afghan institutions have appeared in response to the gap in formal capacity. The *hawala* money-exchange system provides an efficient and reliable structure for financial transfers, reaching well into rural areas and greatly facilitating access to migrant remittances (Maimbo, 2003). This system is believed to have originated to support trading along the Silk Route, and became ‘modernised’ in South Asia as a way to cope with the restrictions on financial transfers established in the India–Pakistan partition (de Goede, 2003). It has filled the gap created by the collapse of formal banking systems in Afghanistan and Somalia, and even constitutes a strong competitor to formal banking structures in other countries, such as Bangladesh. Portrayed after 9/11 in the Western press and by many politicians as a shady enterprise that finances terrorism, views on *hawala* have begun to

undergo a reassessment. It is now increasingly acknowledged to be a highly efficient and essential structure for linking the Afghan rural economy to the international system by channelling vital remittances – ‘it can be argued that what hawala is vilified for (speed, trust, paperlessness, global reach, fluidity) are precisely the attributes that modern globalising investment banking aspires to’ (de Goede, 2003: 517). Indeed, despite the condemnation of *hawala*, most aid agencies in Afghanistan have depended on the system for a major proportion of their own financial transfers.

Informal trading networks have also proved very resilient, building on past experience of opportunistically re-establishing businesses when opportunities have arisen amid recurrent crises and periods of recovery. The domestic market for dried fruit has remained strong, despite the collapse of export markets (FAO, 2003c), and Afghanistan has retained its export market to India for pistachios, even though production has shrunk due to the destruction of forests.

4.2 Reengaging with the state

In much agricultural programming, the weaknesses of formal institutions and policies have led observers to assume that old structures have collapsed. There is a tendency to proceed with programme designs as if there was a blank slate for introducing new policies, institutions and processes. Plans make few references to experience from earlier periods of recovery in the 1990s. The strength of many government institutions (though not necessarily in agriculture) has caught planners off-guard (AREU, 2004).

At the same time, there is reason for agencies to be cautious regarding reengaging the state in agricultural development if they are to avoid encouraging unrealistic expectations of a return to former roles. One workshop of senior officials of the MAAH, Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) and Ministry of Irrigation and Water Resource Economy (MIWRE) began with a statement that the role of the state is ‘To provide everything!! – this is what people want and wish’. The workshop went on: ‘Initially the group unanimously held the state responsible to provide for each and every service and facility. The participants were of the opinion that keeping the present situation of the country the government is supposed to deliver all goodies to the people’ (Hemani, 2003). Through further discussion a more pluralistic vision was ostensibly agreed upon. This example shows that, while capacity-building efforts have encouraged initial discussion of slimmer, more ‘modern’

roles for the state, acceptance of these new ideas is superficial. This is not surprising. The need to prioritise among the potential recipients of the ‘goodies’ is difficult for a government struggling to build its legitimacy across the board. Indeed, the NDF acknowledges that ‘Discussions of development ... remain abstract. Public opinion is shaped by concrete manifestations’. As yet, these concrete manifestations of a facilitating and regulating state, in terms of service provision, have yet to be seen, and thus remain abstract. The government has yet to shoulder those tasks that are ‘approved’ within NPM approaches, such as inspection and control of the quality of imported inputs.

Concretisation of new development models, in the eyes of rural Afghans, will chiefly occur at local levels and in frontline service provision. Local authorities will eventually bear much of the responsibility, but the roles of different levels of government remain ‘a nuance lacking in the current strategy’ (Sedra & Middlebrook, 2004: 3). Very little headway has been made in defining roles outside of ministry offices in Kabul. The vast majority of politicians and civil servants in agriculture still take for granted that reconstruction will include a large and well-financed state-led agricultural development structure. This is in line with their past experience, and there is little understanding or awareness of the public sector reforms that have been undertaken throughout the world over the past two decades. There is a major gap between the vision for agriculture and rural development outlined in the NDF, and prevailing agricultural policy as perceived by most of those working with the MAAH. One donor assistance strategy notes that “‘Ownership’ within individual ATA [Transitional Authority] ministries [for the NDF] varies’ (DFID, 2003: 5). The government has acknowledged this openly (MRRD, 2002). Provincial and district officials retain the view that, since agriculture is the ‘backbone’ of the local economy, this justifies state dominance in the financing and provision of agricultural services and in planning production priorities. Even relations to civil society are assumed to require a strong leading role for the state. For example, plans are being put in place for a vast expansion of government advisors and subsidy structures to guide a revival of agricultural cooperatives.

Box 5: ‘More research and extension’ – where does it lead?

Afghanistan is frequently said to need ‘more research and extension’. These calls for ‘more’ notwithstanding, it is not always clear what the ultimate aims of research and extension activities are meant to be, nor how the different modalities on offer might serve to achieve them. Research and extension are not objectives in and of themselves. Their values can only be assessed in relation to the ultimate aims to which they contribute. The goals of ‘more research and extension’ are frequently left vague in current programming, but seem to focus on combinations of the following:

- increased food security through higher cereal yields;
- increased income through improved quality, timeliness and quantitative production of commercial crops;
- decreased opium production, through increased awareness and efficiency of alternative production options;
- improvements in the licit national economy through increased tax revenues deriving from agricultural exports and/or national self-reliance; and
- increased equity by supporting women, poor people and ‘vulnerable groups’ to improve their incomes and financial independence.

The pre-war extension system was vertical and had no channels for feedback from the field to headquarters in Kabul. Staff were frequently assigned non-advisory tasks, such as the sale and/or distribution of inputs and implementation of relief and development projects (Khan, 1996). Government extension staff are currently generally perceived by outside observers as being passive. Extension agents themselves frequently acknowledge that they accomplish little due to lack of resources. NGO staff directly conduct the vast majority of project-financed extension activities. The option of using aid resources to contract private extension advisors has not been considered. As long as significant levels of donor funding are available, there is a tendency for NGOs to simply hire more extension agents themselves, without consideration of what kind of agricultural knowledge and information system could or should be developed.

This is not to say that the fully-fledged commercialisation and privatisation of extension services, as underway in many countries, is a viable alternative in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the current unaccountable, supply-driven structures are the only alternative. Publicly financed, aid-funded and privately delivered structures have been established rapidly in other chronically poor, post-conflict contexts (e.g., Albania). There is a wealth of experience with alternative models (see, e.g., Neuchâtel Group, 2002) that has yet to be considered in Afghanistan.

The financial sustainability of public extension services is not a topic for active discussion. The government realises that it has already lost its best staff to NGOs, but the only solution is seen to be more money from Kabul to pay higher salaries and employ more staff. NGO-run extension modalities are expensive, and virtually no attention has been given to planning how such operations could continue when aid financing is reduced. Some reports recommend establishing innovative, but relatively intensive/expensive, extension methods, such as farmer field schools (FAO, 2003c), but strategies have yet to be developed for how recurrent costs will be financed in the future.

The FAO, ADB, DFID and other agencies are investing in capacity-building for the MAAH in order to increase awareness among key staff of current international norms and practices within the sector. Most acknowledge that these efforts have as yet made limited headway. Even where the NPM has been accepted, there is no consensus regarding what a facilitating and regulating state actually consists of on the ground, and what could be done to promote the growth of the private and civil society structures that the state should eventually facilitate and regulate. The blame does not necessarily lie with aid efforts *per se*, but rather with a high level of uncertainty within the system about what capacities should be built. The implications of the NDF for setting priorities have only just begun to be absorbed at an overarching conceptual level. Genuine, widespread and sustainable ownership can only be expected once it is determined what these concepts imply with regard to who does what in extension, cooperatives or veterinary services.

Ambivalence towards the NPM extends beyond the government. Most NGOs have yet to consider how to align the trajectories of their programmes with the NDF. Programmes tend to reflect a *de facto* assumption that all agricultural services are public goods, and that the creation of a market for private services will have to be dealt with in the distant future (i.e., by

someone else). Even increasing opportunities to access support for more private sector-oriented programming have not yet stimulated a major change in direction. The services that NGOs provide are not dissimilar to those that state actors would like to assume. The prospects for sustainability are not significantly better with NGO provision than with government services.

Public sector reform in Afghanistan consists, to a large extent, of reductions in public sector staff. A paradox in Afghanistan is that there is presently little agricultural bureaucracy to retrench. Instead, there is a need to expand to meet the challenges of a facilitating and regulating state. There is a contradiction between the retrenchment narrative and the actual make-up of the agricultural civil service. For example, even if the state was to abandon its hopes for engaging again in direct service provision, the challenges it faces in shouldering the regulatory and facilitatory tasks envisaged in the NDF are enormous. Border controls, inspection of imported fertiliser and pesticides and the need to monitor and regulate a transparent system for agricultural finance are all pressing needs where capacity will need to be enhanced.

4.3 Civil society and farmers' organisations

Until recently, international approaches to stimulating demand-driven agricultural services often assumed that a free market could ensure that farmers get what they want. If individual farmers were given an opportunity to choose and buy the services they need, then the issue of demand would be solved. Analyses of the powerlessness that accompanies chronic conflict and poverty have shown that the 'miracle of the marketplace' is rarely so straightforward. Furthermore, the transaction costs experienced by individual farmers, who can at best buy a few kilos of seed or a few sacks of fertiliser, are too great to be overcome by the efficiency increases that may be found through more effective markets. Instead, there is a growing realisation that demand needs to be stimulated by investing in civil society and farmers' organisations. Only through joint action can farmers hope to overcome their lack of power and take advantage of efficiencies of scale in accessing services.

The aid community in Afghanistan has an ambivalent approach to investment in the institutional infrastructure for stimulating demand. Acknowledgements of the weaknesses of local institutions are followed by statements of commitment to channelling resources through these institutions, but little is said about how to combine these objectives without further

locking local civil society into aid management. This is a key issue in defining where ‘rehabilitation’ fits between the humanitarian and development agendas, as a heavy-handed supply-side approach to working with local organisations is unlikely to create the conditions for sustainable, market-led interventions. A failure to openly consider what the terms of engagement should be with civil society and farmers’ organisations is an indication that the dynamics of the aid system are running counter to professed policy aims.

The traditional councils or *shuras* are the lynchpin in the plans of the aid community (and to some extent the government as well) for the institutional infrastructure that will support future demand driven agricultural and rural development, and for rebuilding what is popularly assumed to be heavily depleted social capital. If *shuras* are to be employed as the solution, it is first important to critically analyse the problems of social capital and community-level governance, and whether *shura* members are themselves interested in addressing these problems. It is also important to consider whether they might even be part of the problem.

Current understanding of ‘traditional’ local organisations suggests caution. Studies have shown that the consensus formed through participatory methods rarely represent the concerns of the poor or marginalised (see Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Grünwald, 2003; Harvey, 1997; Keen, 1994). Even otherwise laudatory reviews of the role of the *shuras* acknowledge that ‘What the agency expects the *shura* to do, in the function of a Village Development Association, is something very different from what the *shura* is used to do, what it is set up to do, and what the community expects it to do’ (Harpviken, 2001: 11). Many agencies haphazardly load their programme documents with a mix of managerial and social engineering tasks for the *shuras*. One evaluation comments:

The objectives for Village Organisations (VOs) ... are too many and too diverse, as they include narrow objectives relating to programme activities and broad objectives about ‘empowerment’ ...it is difficult to know whether DACAAR sees VOs mainly as the interface between itself and villages, or as new institutions to challenge traditional sources of power, or as both (Kempenaar et al., 2002: 15–16).

The sustainability of *shura*-based community development must be questioned. Despite concerted efforts at ‘empowerment’, extending over a decade, an evaluation of one major integrated rural development programme notes with concern that not a single *shura* has ‘graduated’ from programme support (Reddick, 2003). Chris Johnson notes that ‘It is unclear what civil society actually means in the Afghan context’ (2003: 6). In an earlier study, Johnson found that villagers had lost faith in their own institutions, ‘Yet although they wanted a new leadership, people also spoke of their lack of hope that it would emerge from within the community. They pinned their hopes instead on the idea that it might come from outside’ (2000: 7). Johnson points out that a significant degree of legitimacy remained at the ‘very local village level’, but stresses the distrust towards people with power and guns. Alden Wily (2004) has reported similar findings. Commanders have been widely cited as having abused their power by appropriating irrigation resources. In addition to direct injustices, this has also weakened the *mirabs*, the traditional water management authorities (GoA, 2004b), which may have repercussions on efforts to re-establish a strong role for civil society.

It is possible that some social capital would be characterised by much of the aid community as ‘unsocial capital’, i.e., as ‘obnoxious’ (see Kanbur, 2001) market relationships based on the opium trade and abuse of power. The interplay of ‘social’ and ‘unsocial’ capitals frames many of the livelihood choices that face rural Afghans. Pain and Lautze write that ‘Contrary to popular thinking, states do not fail in times of chronic conflict and political instability; rather they become conveniently diffuse, rich in complicated networks that extend from local strongmen/warlords to the boardrooms of international firms’ (2002: 18). Both social and unsocial capital form the ‘glue’ that holds these broader economic and political networks together.

At another level, research into the role of traditional institutions and social capital has recognised that, while these institutions are the first (and most reliable) source of support for the destitute and those experiencing livelihood shocks, they also reinforce structural poverty. Kothari and Hulme write:

When poor people in Bangladesh face problems their first port of call for social support are these local/informal networks and not ‘professional’ poverty reduction agencies. Having said this, there is a need to shift our focus in contemporary development policy from an

uncritical valorisation of civil society in order to recognise that social capital is not always and inevitably a positive asset but one which can also keep poor people poor (2003: 13).

This could be especially true where the local power structures that lead ‘civil society’ have the kind of unfettered power they enjoy in Afghanistan. There is, however, little acknowledgement of ambivalence about the power of civil society in Afghan rural development programming. A typical programme document states: ‘Participatory decision-making can empower the marginalised and develop a community’s capacity to analyse its environment, identify and address its problems, and take responsibility for development’ (FAO, 2003b: 13). Despite disturbing evidence and experience of the abuse of power by warlords, commanders and village elites, a myth of egalitarianism in Afghan civil society remains.

Another central question regarding the role of *shuras* in supporting agricultural development is whether they can be considered to be, or can be transformed into, ‘farmers’ organisations’, with accountability to *members*, rather than to the community as a whole, and whether they can manage economic transactions in a market economy. This is doubtful within current aid modalities. There are two reasons for this. First, prospects for sustainability are poor as long as aid projects operate as the main buyer of the produce (as is the case in much seed production). Many project plans are vague about how the supporting agency will eventually withdraw and either be replaced by market relations with commercial traders and processors, or by a higher-level organisational structure that can assume responsibility for marketing and other tasks. There are efforts to work with intermediate levels (e.g., the creation of ‘cluster *shuras*’), but there is little indication that these organisations are motivated by a genuine desire to engage in cooperative economic activities. Furthermore, mechanisms to ensure financial accountability to ‘members’ have not been developed. This should come as no surprise. The *shuras* are ultimately not economically oriented membership organisations, but political bodies.

The second problem in treating *shuras* as if they were farmers’ organisations is the tendency to combine community development efforts, with primarily social development aims, with the organisation of producers, which must be led by commercial and market prerogatives focusing on the interests of individual member households. Agricultural development efforts

that are channelled through *shuras* may be effective in dealing with some public goods, such as locust control, but are unlikely to develop into the type of structures that would be necessary to address private goods.

5. Aid architecture

5.1 Looking beyond project-fixes

Working with local institutions as implementing partners provides a veneer of sustainability for short-term supply-driven programming. Through their role as channels for distributions or for organising labour inputs, these institutions are expected to be ‘empowered’ to manage their own affairs after a short-term injection of aid.

There are reasons to doubt such assumptions. Current agricultural rehabilitation programming tends to consist of collections of projects without clear exit strategies or links to longer-term planning for agricultural reconstruction. There is no clear view about how rehabilitation will eventually be linked to Afghanistan’s developmental plans as these projectised approaches are by nature severely limited by their small scale, and the difficulties that they present for achieving effective coordination, sectoral balance and relevance to broader market imperatives. In lieu of a broad-based policy implementation process, programmes and projects have become a proxy for operationalisable policies. One result of this is that competition over supplies and over speed in expending them (and achieving ‘quick impacts’) has in some ways taken precedence over coordination and strategic direction. The ‘triumph of the project’ means that policy issues are displaced by the need to move funds (Duffield et al., 2002). One evaluation from 2002 states that ‘Current reconstruction practice – what agencies actually do and how they do it – in practice bears more resemblance to regionalism and warlordism than to a coherent and effective aid programme’ (Kempenaar et al., 2002: 7). Coordination has improved since then, but it is still rudimentary in many respects. Few would describe Afghan agricultural development efforts as a shining example of ‘good donorship’.

It is easy to blame implementing actors in the government, FAO and the NGOs for allowing projects to displace the policy debate, but thus far funding horizons have been very short, and therefore provide little space for coherent policy implementation. A number of policy advisors are scattered throughout ministry offices in Kabul. At provincial and district (i.e., operational) levels, however, small delivery-oriented projects are still far easier to fund than diffuse capacity-building initiatives. When funding is only available for one to two years, as is currently the norm, strategic thinking is unlikely. The phasing out of emergency funding has yet to be matched by an increase in development spending. Operational agencies are being

criticised for being stuck in relief modalities, but funding structures have not supported those actors who wish to take on a more strategic agenda. International NGOs and UN agencies are criticised for their failure to adapt to the new situation, but as long as funding is so uncertain, they have good cause not to risk investing their own resources in gearing up for long-term strategic initiatives. Furthermore, it may be unethical to raise expectations among farmers, extension agents and private actors by trying to establish more sustainable relations between agricultural service providers and their clients when support is in danger of being discontinued after a few months.

5.2 Titles and tactics in humanitarian, emergency and development programming

Although many agencies have explicit policies defining their actions as ‘humanitarian’ or ‘developmental’, when it comes to agricultural rehabilitation little attention is paid to how their projects ‘fit’ these categories. Pure humanitarian agencies, such as ICRC, are quicker to phase out than agencies with a dual mandate, such as Oxfam. Those working with bilateral and multilateral agencies are largely oblivious to the ‘humanitarian sector’. Most humanitarian and development agencies are eager to keep their distance from the military Provincial Reconstruction Teams for fear that this would increase security risks. But apart from associations with the military, very few actors in agricultural rehabilitation express concerns about the implications of humanitarian principles or association with governmental structures.

On a programming level, the difference between ‘humanitarian’ and ‘development’ labels is not directly related to modalities or to needs. The choice of whether or not to label an intervention as ‘humanitarian’ or ‘development’ has more to do with which label best ensures access to funding, rather than with the nature of the support given. The term ‘emergency’ is more commonly used than ‘humanitarian’ to refer to programmes that are funded from short-term sources. Some ‘emergency programming’ consists of projects that the implementing agency would like to use for development purposes, but where short-term funding is used since it is the only resource available. Emergency programming is a contentious topic for many implementing NGOs. Some common criticisms are:

- Emergency programming is seen to be too big and too rushed, leading to low agency expectations regarding impact and a feeling that ‘we have to do it’.

- It is now readily acknowledged that there is no absolute seed shortage that needs to be addressed, and that emergency modalities of heavily subsidised distributions may have unnecessarily disrupted developmental modalities designed to gradually establish a financially sustainable seed industry.
- Given pressures to move large quantities of aid in a short time, agencies have little capacity to ensure that emergency agricultural programming really reaches the poor and vulnerable.
- There are many examples of how intra-agency agreements regarding cost recovery, beneficiary selection or other issues (e.g., uniform wage rates) have been ignored: (a) when agencies failed to act in accordance with agreed procedures; (b) when a donor applied undue pressure to distribute a certain commodity (e.g., imported seed); (c) when new staff have not been briefed or trained regarding their agency's commitments and agreements; or (d) when a new agency appeared in a district to conduct a 'hit-and-run' distribution.

NGOs have many stories about the poor quality of emergency programming among their 'competitors', and some even engage in self-criticism. There is a general sense that the *realpolitik* of the aid system has forced many into scaling up beyond a level in which quality could be assured. Confusing signals have been given to beneficiaries about what services could be subsidised. There is a clear sense of relief among some agencies that emergency funds are now becoming scarce and that there is an opportunity to return to development modalities. A very large investment in discussions at village level has been required to explain the need to change the terms and modalities of cooperation back and forth between emergency and development 'rules' regarding repayment for seed and other demands for 'community inputs'. These changes have not been seen by the beneficiaries/clients of these services as being related to the changing levels of livelihood stress that they have experienced.

In addition to funding modalities, the shift from emergency to developmental approaches has been constrained by organisational culture. The chronic crises of the past quarter-century have resulted in the presence of a large number of agencies that are accustomed to relief modalities. Staff take 'supply-side', distribution-focused programming for granted. There are strong feelings of solidarity with the communities with which they work, who are seen as being too poor to pay for any form of services. The replacement of humanitarian staff with more development-oriented personnel is resisted by many long-term expatriates who are dedicated

‘Afghanistanists’ and do not want to work in any other country. This legacy is being challenged by new interagency competition, in particular tendering and sub-contracting procedures that create internal pressures for change within those agencies hoping to continue working in Afghanistan with post-emergency programming.

Despite the prevalence of short-term funding, exit strategies in most agricultural programming are vague or non-existent. This is particularly alarming where local micro-credit, revolving funds and other structures are being established, which would seem to require a certain level of presence over a significant period. Oxfam has been one of the few agencies to take a self-critical stance on its failure to define how it will leave (Reddick, 2003). The UN hopes that transitional programming will increasingly assume some consistency in defining the ‘end state’ of programming across the relief and development spheres. Some NGO representatives privately express concern about the negative effects of bypass structures and projectisation on efforts to work towards an appropriate end state. Evidence thus far seems to indicate that the bilateralisation of aid flows (Duffield et al., 2002) and the competitive pressures of the aid market constrain joint UN–NGO–government analysis at provincial and district levels as to how programming should or could contribute to mutual aims, and with that agreement on handover and exit strategies.

Box 6: The food aid debate in Afghanistan

Differing views on the relevance of continued food aid are at the centre of the Afghan debate on food security. Cereal production has reached record levels, and wheat prices have in some regions dropped (Favre, 2003a). Several agencies have blamed food aid for this fall in producer prices, and claim that this has contributed to the increase in opium production as food production has become unprofitable (Christian Aid, 2003; RFE/RL, 2003). Others respond that food aid accounted for only 12% of demand at the height of relief operations (Maletta, 2003). The price drop could instead be attributed to increased domestic production and imports of milled flour from neighbouring countries (Molla, 2003). The assumption that there is a direct trade-off in land use between opium and cereal production is disputed by the fact that cereal cropping area has increased parallel to increases in poppy production (ibid), since few farmers plant more than a small proportion of their land with poppies (Mansfield, 2001).

Some areas of the country are still experiencing the effects of drought and warfare, with cereal deficits and high prices as a result. Apart from urban areas, deficits are primarily in the south (notably Kandahar, Uruzgan and Zabul), where the drought has continued and where transport of surpluses from the north is costly and increasingly subject to security constraints (FEWS Net, 2003). Throughout the country, significant segments of the population, especially internally displaced Kuchi pastoralists, apparently lack entitlements to food, through either direct production or other livelihood strategies. Since procurement, milling and transport constraints are the main reasons for high prices and lack of access to food in deficit areas, some ask whether imported food aid is an appropriate response, or if it is feasible to address handling and entitlements issues instead.

WFP would say no in answer to this last question. Despite its position as the strongest agency in Afghanistan in terms of logistical field capacity, WFP is nonetheless too weak to deal with the massive transaction costs of local procurement and transport given logistical constraints and the lack of large grain merchants in the country. The Afghan formal private sector does not have the capacity to manage large contracts. If food procurement were managed on a market basis, this would favour regional purchases of grain from neighbouring countries, where prices are lower, milling capacity is greater, institutional and physical infrastructure stronger and quality control higher. Few would argue that there are, in principle, better ways than food aid to address Afghanistan's food insecurity. There is regrettably no quick fix for addressing the paradox of food distributions after a bumper harvest. For the longer term, some donors intend to invest heavily in processing and marketing. If this is successful, more appropriate ways to ensure equitable access to domestic food surpluses can be expected to be available in the future.

5.3 Can social protection fill the breach?

Humanitarianism and the social protection activities that are implemented as part of rehabilitation and development programming differ in their legal frameworks, but overlap with respect to ethical commitments to ensure basic survival and human dignity. The interface between social protection and humanitarian action is relatively uncharted territory. There are uncomfortable questions regarding the implicit acknowledgement of the ethical imperative for development programmes to sometimes support 'unsustainable' investments. The lack of clarity in terminology related to rehabilitation, recovery, reconstruction, and the rest stems

partially from a failure to define how the values and operational priorities of humanitarianism, social protection and growth relate to one another.

Social protection is on the agenda in Afghanistan. The justifications put forward for the expansion of social protection structures are five-fold:

- Social protection represents an agenda for a smooth transition from a chaotic and haphazard collection of relief projects to a more reliable and regularised system that protects the population as a whole.
- The negative impacts of certain forms of humanitarian assistance (e.g., food aid) can be addressed if programming is placed in a more regularised structure under the leadership of the government.
- Social protection can strengthen the legitimacy of the state by allowing it to re-shoulder its responsibilities for ensuring the basic survival of its citizens.
- As a country prone to natural disasters and high levels of seasonal stress, Afghanistan needs a system with which to respond to the needs of disaster-affected people.
- Rural people are perceived as shifting to opium production in response to acute livelihood stress, and a social protection system is therefore seen as an important component of a counter-narcotics strategy.

Most importantly, it is clear that a significant proportion of the population faces a structural deficit of assets by which to meet basic livelihood needs. Even if the most optimistic projections of the international community hold, a significant number of people will still experience extreme hardship every year. If the Afghan state (rather than the international community) is to manage its responsibilities for the survival of its citizens, an institutionally sustainable safety net is needed. If it fails, the government's social contract with its citizens will be profoundly flawed. Concerns are being raised about the untenable nature of the organisational roles in the protection of livelihoods. The MRRD has pointed out that 'Accountability is blurred. In the eyes of most Afghans, the government is responsible for social protection, but is not seen to be playing a leadership role in respect to humanitarian resources. As a result, accountability is not clear if things go wrong' (MRRD, 2002: 3).

The MRRD has issued a policy paper entitled 'From Humanitarian Assistance to Social Protection' (2002). Such a move from humanitarian to more stable modalities involves first a shift of responsibilities from the international community to the government. It will also demand a shift from providing support to loosely defined sets of beneficiaries, consisting of 'vulnerable groups' and disaster victims, to much more refined targeting tools – a major preoccupation in design of social protection mechanisms (see Devereux, 2002). While overall data collection regarding vulnerability is improving rapidly, the capacity of the government for transparent and non-politicised inter-community targeting at field level remains limited.

For example, the MRRD is planning how to best implement the National Emergency Employment Programme (NEEP), a large-scale social fund that is a centre-piece in the proposed shift from humanitarian assistance to social protection. The primary obstacle to a smooth transition from food for work, primarily managed by WFP, to NEEP lies in the vast differences in human and logistical resources available for these ostensibly similar modalities. WFP is undoubtedly the best-equipped agency in Afghanistan in making things happen in the rural areas. The desire to ensure that the MRRD's NEEP management structures remain lean and 'sustainable' has meant that they possess only a tiny fraction of the resources available to WFP for designing, targeting, managing and monitoring activities in the field. There is reason to fear that the quality deficiencies already apparent in many food for work efforts are likely to be far more severe in NEEP. The expectation is that NEEP will address these capacity gaps through contracting private sector providers (MRRD, 2002), but the capacity of the government to act as a 'smart buyer' of such services has been questioned. The appointment of external oversight agents should support the government in managing this responsibility, but will not absolve it of the need to strengthen its capacity to monitor the contracting of social service providers.

While there is no doubt about the desirability of ensuring that social protection structures contribute to agricultural development, weaknesses remain in finding strategies to develop the institutional capacities that would be required to bridge the two. Lack of capacity to assess viability has meant that income generation has been largely left out of the first phase of the National Solidarity Programme. Discussion of agriculture's role in social protection, and with that the possible transition of agricultural rehabilitation programming into social protection, has not occurred since these issues have been the domain of the MRRD and not the MAAH.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Beyond uncertainty

The Afghan rural development agenda hinges on how to proceed in the face of uncertainty about the role of civil society, distrust of the private sector and disagreement over the role of the state. The efforts of the aid community to live up to declarations about empowering civil society, putting the government ‘in the driver’s seat’ and creating a ‘level playing field’ for the private sector have been highly erratic. At the front line of agricultural development efforts, the aid community is still in charge. The focus on seeds, as a form of intervention that can be implemented with relatively limited government or private sector engagement, may in some ways be a product of the ambivalence towards institutional development shown by agencies that have weak understanding of, relations with and trust in Afghan institutions.

There is substantial justification for such ambivalence. Afghanistan could, with some degree of optimism, be described as a country in transition from a state of chronic conflict (due to war) to a state of chronic violence and insecurity.¹⁰ From human rights abuse directly related to war, the country is shifting towards a context of continued widespread abuses of rights related to access to land, water and markets, stemming from the power that has been accumulated by individuals with guns. The cessation of most open armed conflict has modified a complex political process that has been underway through a long period of Afghan history, but for most rural Afghans it has not suddenly created an entirely new state of affairs.

The degree to which agricultural rehabilitation supports rural people in their efforts to construct viable livelihoods will partly relate to how well agricultural policies and programming are anchored in realistic, principled and pragmatic analyses of the situation at large. In Afghanistan, as anywhere, policies to ensure that rural development alleviates poverty or suffering are reliant on three factors:

- the ability of agents (governmental, NGO or private sector) to administer their programmes effectively;
- the ability to ensure that targeted beneficiaries are reached; and

¹⁰ Pain and Goodhand (2002) have suggested that Afghanistan may move in a similar direction as post-war Guatemala, which experienced an increase in rural violence after the formal cessation of hostilities.

- the ability to challenge vested interests that seek to reappropriate the benefits that accrue to the intended beneficiaries.

(based on Johnson & Start, 2001)

Some progress is being made in the first two areas. Major questions remain about whether agencies are ready or able to address the third (see Lister & Pain, 2004). Many agencies possess a strong body of tacit knowledge about what might be a principled and pragmatic approach for achieving these aims. What they often lack is a framework of intervention that supports – and applies – this knowledge in programme design and implementation. The ‘triumph of the project’ often overrules this tacit knowledge about the limited ability of rehabilitation programmes to supersede, influence or bypass the political and economic structures that constrain the livelihoods of the poor.

The challenge of confronting the political economy of rural and agricultural development in Afghanistan is not just a transitional issue. Predatory commanders, unscrupulous entrepreneurs, uncivil society and the ‘weak state’ are going to be around for some time. Even the most enthusiastic promoters of alternative livelihoods do not expect to sweep away the ‘narco-mafia state’ in the next few years. Conflict and uncertainty will remain part of how a farmer decides whether to plant a given crop, whether a landowner decides it is worth investing in maintaining soil fertility, whether a trader tries to enter new and potentially more profitable markets and whether prospective returning migrants and refugees see agriculture as something they want to build their survival upon.

Despite all this uncertainty, the extraordinary growth in agricultural production in 2002 and 2003 indicates that *something* is getting rehabilitated in rural Afghanistan. The scattered but disturbing indications that this growth has resulted in limited improvement in livelihoods among the majority of rural people gives cause for grave concern. We simply do not know much about what is happening with regard to confronting vested interests and thereby transforming emergency projects into pro-poor rural development. We do not know what factors enable poor people in Afghanistan to benefit from production growth. There is no clear picture, at micro level, of what might create an enabling environment for the poor and landless to thrive through agricultural development, and what might encourage further extortion and land-grabbing. Some observers fear that ‘rich valleys generate political ambitions’ (Solidarités, 2001: 10). Others have found that rich valleys have been able to bribe

local commanders, and thus avoid the ravages of conflict (Alden Wily, 2004). Participatory platforms may be a way to resolve conflicts over resource tenure. They may, on the other hand, merely inflame existing tensions between pastoralists and settled farmers, and between landowners and tenants as ‘communities’ are pressured to present their ‘consensus’ in order to access aid flows. These are some of the central questions as Afghanistan shifts from rehabilitation to development.

Both the aid community and the Afghan government remain rooted in a conviction that development interventions can create the missing ‘social capital’ that will bind together rural development processes. Neither encourages investigation into what forms of social capital are actually being built in Afghan villages, and the markets and networks in which they are entwined. Furthermore, neither NGO nor government interventions are being mobilised with the political or economic skills to catch up with the rehabilitation agenda that rural people themselves have been pursuing for years.

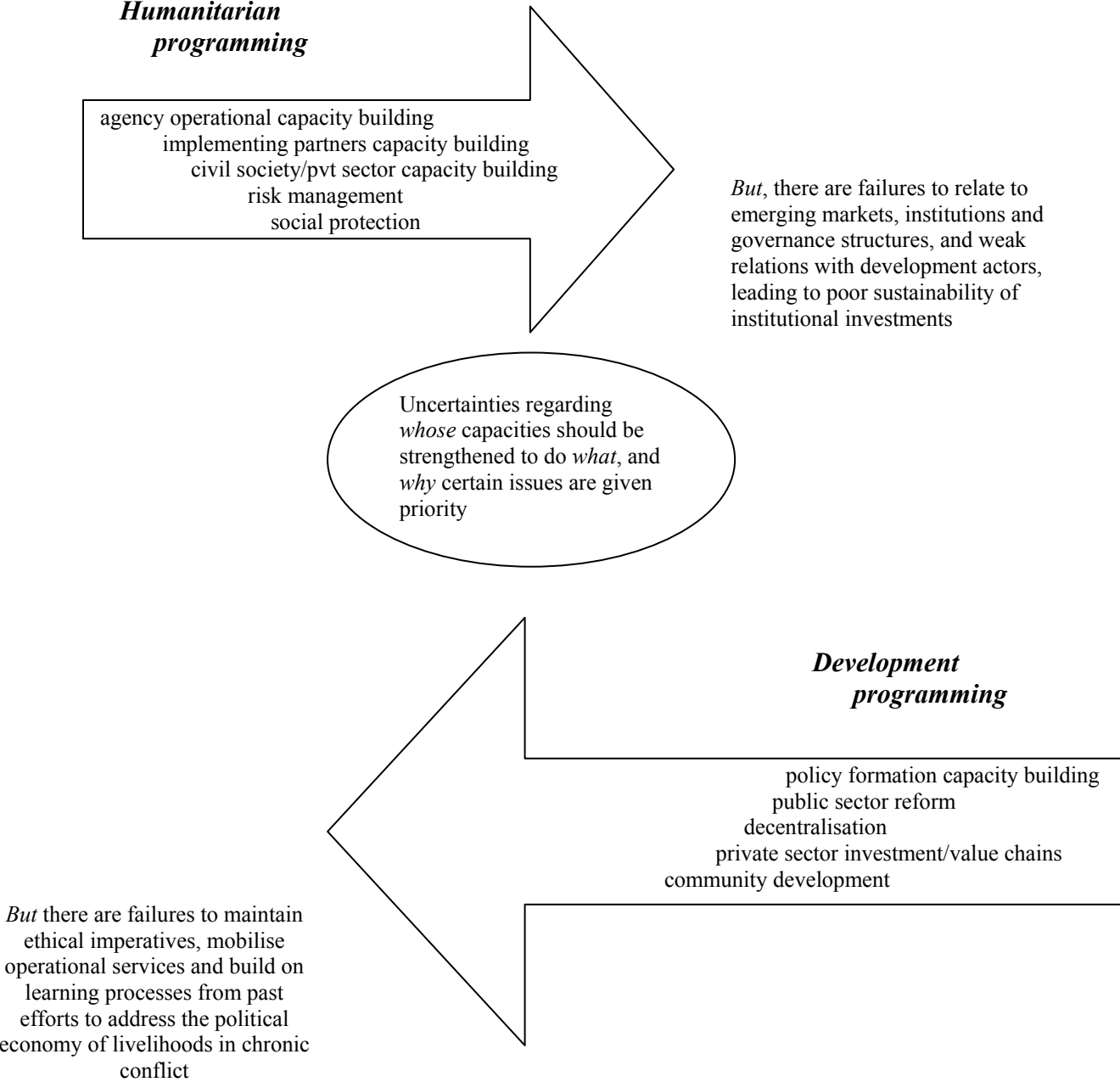
6.2 Rehabilitating agricultural services as a link (rather than an obstacle) in LRRD

This case study has found that the potential for linking relief, rehabilitation and development through agricultural interventions can best be enhanced by focusing on building the capacities of, and relations between, key institutions, particularly those that provide, facilitate, regulate and demand agricultural services. This is not to say that agricultural services alone are the foundation for improved rural livelihoods. Rural Afghans have been getting on with rehabilitating their livelihoods themselves for years, despite highly dysfunctional rural services. The reason that this is the key factor reviewed here is that it is the primary entry point through which the aid community can intervene to support rural Afghan livelihoods. Furthermore, more effective and efficient services can contribute to re-establishing state legitimacy and stability by demonstrating that the government intends to build a new social contract with its citizens.

Currently, the agricultural efforts of the humanitarian and development communities are poorly integrated (see Figure 2). Capacities are being strengthened by the humanitarian community, but mostly to implement aid projects rather than to contribute to sustainable service provision. The objective is simply to deliver services, instead of addressing the problems of weak institutions and poor access to services outside of short-term projects. Development efforts look beyond local projects, but as yet there is little linkage to the field-

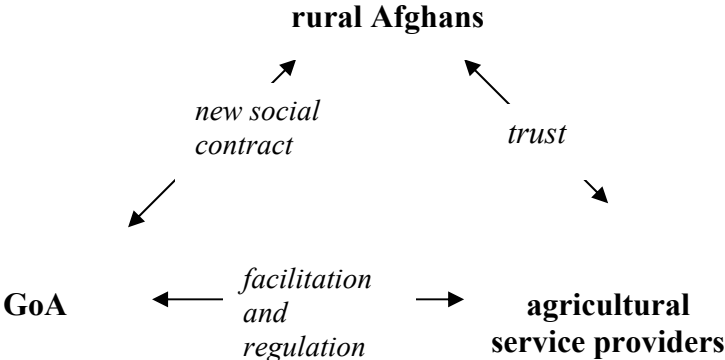
level realities of sustainable service provision. The humanitarian community has little capacity to engage in the search for greater sustainability, while the development community has little capacity to see to it that services actually reach targeted beneficiaries and clients. Both have plans that may eventually contribute to such links (e.g., humanitarian interest in social protection and development interest in community development), but progress in bringing these conceptual frameworks together has been limited.

Figure 2: Missed messages in linking relief, rehabilitation and development



There is, however, a significant opportunity to use interventions to rebuild a social contract and also to get essential services out to farmers (Figure 3). This requires a shift in two areas. First, there needs to be a wider dialogue within the aid community about how, for example, visions for the roles of private and public sectors can be operationalised through sustainable service provision institutions. Second, this dialogue must be underpinned by an aid architecture that makes it worthwhile for these actors to work together. Good progress has been made on macro-budgetary reform, but much needs to be done at operational levels as well. Increased investment in licit agricultural production will require greater trust between producers and those providing them with agricultural services. The market cannot create this trust alone. The capacity of the state to live up to its facilitation and regulatory responsibilities must be expanded.

Figure 3: Public and private sector roles: beyond the impasse



6.3 Acknowledging limits

Whereas agricultural services have a vital (and potentially growing) role to play in linking humanitarianism and development, there are also fundamental limits to how far aid intervention can go in ‘solving’ Afghanistan’s underlying rural problems. Principled support requires an awareness of where rehabilitation can create conditions for significant change (e.g., in agricultural services), and where it can do little (social, political and economic power structures).

At the outset, it is important to acknowledge that humanitarian and rehabilitation assistance are regrettably not very effective mechanisms for reducing vulnerability and alleviating poverty. Agricultural rehabilitation is a very blunt tool with which to induce structural

changes in rural development. Nonetheless, its relative effectiveness relies on awareness of the forces that create and reproduce poverty and conflict. A coherent policy framework for agricultural rehabilitation must therefore be cognisant of the context of past and potential future trajectories in poverty and rural development. For example, in Afghanistan land reform is a long-term, structural task that cannot be addressed through agricultural rehabilitation. Nonetheless, effective, targeted agricultural rehabilitation requires an understanding of the nature of access to land and water. Furthermore, although rehabilitation need not necessarily directly target the poorest, if programmes are to alleviate human suffering and contribute to long-term development a system is needed for predicting the likely indirect effects of rehabilitation interventions on the interactions between different sectors of rural society.

Support for agricultural rehabilitation may not be the greatest priority for disaster-affected people. Most are accustomed to being left to their own devices. Few rural Afghans would be alive today if they had relied in the past on either the state or the aid community to provide basic agricultural services. Agricultural rehabilitation is, however, a sentinel indicator of the challenges in, and opportunities for, supporting livelihoods in chronic conflict situations. If people dare to plough fields and plant crops, this is an indicator that they feel secure enough to invest in rebuilding their livelihoods. It can raise attention to people who have lost control of their land or fallen into debt bondage. The ability of state institutions to support food security is an indicator of whether or not a social contract is re-emerging between state and citizens. The ability of the state and NGOs to divest themselves of input supply responsibilities is related to whether the private sector is ready to invest in the provision of rural services. In sum, agricultural rehabilitation can reveal if, where and how a new 'post'-conflict order is emerging, and how the political economy of that new order is affecting the survival and dignity of rural people.

Annex 1. Summary profile of the research project

Project title: The changing roles of agricultural rehabilitation: linking relief, development and support to rural livelihoods

Collaborating organisations:

- Overseas Development Institute, London
- FAO Rehabilitation and Humanitarian Policies Unit, Rome
- International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics, Nairobi

Overall research aim: to develop a greater level of conceptual clarity and identify practical strategies on how changing agricultural rehabilitation policies can contribute to linking humanitarian assistance and longer-term development through the provision of effective, principled support to rural livelihoods in chronic conflict and post-conflict (CC&PC) situations.

Specific objectives:

1. To develop a detailed empirical and conceptual understanding of the complex nature of how agricultural rehabilitation efforts impact on and relate to poverty, vulnerability and institutional configurations in CC&PC situations, based on an understanding of the ways in which rural people access resources and the role that local institutions and political factors play in the adaptation of local livelihood strategies.
2. To analyse critically the relationship between food security strategies, agricultural rehabilitation and poverty reduction in contexts where the roles of relief and development programming are shifting. Particular attention will be placed on reviewing how aid to agricultural services can be adapted in post-conflict and politically unstable environments to ensure that investments support effective, accountable and legitimate institutions, so protecting humanitarian principles and promoting sustainability.
3. To develop greater conceptual clarity and policy/institutional/programming options for donors and operational agencies to support rural livelihoods of poor and vulnerable groups through agricultural rehabilitation in CC&PC situations.

Proposed project outputs:

- relevant programming information for targeted agricultural rehabilitation interventions;
- better informed policy recommendations for agricultural rehabilitation in chronic conflict and post-conflict situations that do not simply focus on polarised notions of relief or development; and
- unique understanding of the potentials and pitfalls in efforts to find synergy between relief and development programming.

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