UNDERSTANDING AND ADDRESSING CONTEXT IN RURAL AFGHANISTAN

How Villages Differ and Why

Adam Pain and Paula Kantor

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AREU

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About the Authors

Adam Pain has worked on issues of rural livelihoods in the Himalayan region for the last 20 years. He is a senior research fellow at the Department of International Development, University of East Anglia, United Kingdom, and a visiting professor of rural development at the Department of Urban and Rural Development, Swedish University of Agricultural Science, Uppsala. His recent research has focused on informal credit structures in rural Afghan communities and rural livelihoods in the context of the opium economy.

Paula Kantor was the director of AREU from August 2008 to July 2010. In this time she was a co-principle investigator leading AREU's study on rural livelihood change. Prior to this she managed AREU research on gender and livelihoods and was a lecturer in Development Studies at the University of East Anglia in the United Kingdom.

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Tables and Boxes

Glossary

arbab	traditional village leader
haji	an individual who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca
jerib	unit of land measurement, approximately one-fifth of a hectare
khan	landlord
malik	village leader
mantiqua	a variable unit of social allegiance or spatial territory that may unite villages
qawm	a form of solidarity that may be based on kinship, residence or occupation
ser	unit of weight measurement, approximately seven kilos
Sharia	Islamic system of law
shura	community council
ulema	educated religious leaders and arbiters of *sharia*
ulluswal	district governor

Acronyms

AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
CDC	community development council
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
NGO	nongovernmental organisation

Executive Summary

Most programmatic interventions at the village level take little account of context or preconditions, often due to resource constraints. For the purposes of this paper, context is defined as the existing social order, as determined by how a society is organised and the ways in which prevailing economic, political and social systems contribute to that organisation. Village social orders include geography and place as key structural components. Village, district and provincial contexts can both constrain and provide opportunities for households seeking to improve their circumstances. Context analysis should be recognised as fundamental to programme design, implementation and evaluation.

This paper draws on a study of changing household economies in 11 villages across four provinces in Afghanistan since 2002. It analyses the significance of regional contexts and their long histories, pointing to differences between the more egalitarian subsistence societies of the mountains and the rich but socially unequal agricultural surplus societies of the plains. It locates the four study provinces—Badakhshan, Sar-i-Pul, Faryab and Kandahar—within these regional histories and points to their distinctive social orders.

This paper provides a detailed investigation of the characteristics and behaviour of the 11 study villages and draws attention to the variation in village resource endowments, the ways in which these resources are distributed between households and the capacities of the villages to generate public goods. The villages all survive and prosper according to the degree to which they are successful in building patronage relationships with the outside world. The paper presents evidence that these properties and the variations between them may characterise villages across Afghanistan. There is wider evidence of the capacity of villages to deliver public goods through customary structures. It is argued that variation between villages in supporting public goods is linked to existing levels of inequality. High levels of inequality reduce social solidarity, while conditions that generate social solidarity include low levels of inequality, subsistence economies and villages elites who are economically insecure. Where inequalities are high, economic surplus is generated and elites are economically independent; there are thus few incentives to promote provision of public goods or social solidarity. Interventions designed to provide greater access to resources cannot override these village preconditions, and programme outcomes are often subject to them.

A basic framework for building and applying an understanding of village preconditions is proposed, capturing the position of the village in relation to both the external world and its own internal arrangements. This involves assessing villages by a variety of different indicators, including factors such as landscape position and distance from district centres in the case of the former, and resource endowment, land distribution and education in the case of the latter. It is argued that this provides a basis for the clustering of villages that are similar or dissimilar for programming purposes—for design, implementation and evaluation. More attention must be paid to working with existing conditions in the village, and understanding the context rather than ignoring it. Where village structures already function well, there are opportunities to build on existing successes. Where village structures are characterised by exclusionary elite behaviour, programming needs to provide incentives to bring about changes in behaviour among elites. It is unrealistic to expect a rapid transformation in village social orders, given the wider context in which they are embedded. Donors can encourage more context-sensitive programming by increasing flexibility regarding implementation methods and assessment of outcomes.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Since 2001, many policy and programmatic interventions at the village level in Afghanistan have intended to widen the provision of public goods, increase household access to markets and restructure relations in the public sphere within the village. This restructuring has had the specific intent of displacing customary structures of village management—governed by personalised relations— with new organisations and behavioural practices based on open competition.

Many of these efforts are characterised by a lack of attention to and interest in understanding and responding to the variability and complexity of village-level behaviour.[1] There are exceptions, but often more effort has gone into asserting what these villages should become—driven by efforts to transplant key institutional arrangements of the West such as democracy, markets and competition— than has gone into efforts to understand and build on existing structures. In spite of this approach, village preconditions affect the ways in which programmes engage with villages and can influence intervention outcomes.

At present, most rural households in Afghanistan gain what welfare and security they can through informal means.[2] These gains may be partially secured through limited access to imperfect markets, and in some cases through support from family networks or close neighbours and friends. For many, however, welfare is achieved through forms of security dependent on village, local or regional elites or patrons. Afghanistan functions through deeply personalised networks and connections at multiple levels, and ways these relationships work are context-specific.

The purpose of this paper, which draws on empirical fieldwork, is to make the case that context—at the village level in particular, but also at district and provincial levels—needs to be more systematically analysed and addressed in policy and programming for rural Afghanistan. Drawing on a study of changes in household livelihoods in Afghanistan, this paper outlines ways in which this may be accomplished. Households in 11 villages in four contrasting provinces were first studied in 2002-03, and were revisited again in 2008-09. The study focused on building an understanding of individual household trajectories—whether household livelihoods had stayed the same, improved or declined—and the potential causes of such changes. There was also an interest in determining if, and how, social contexts helped or constrained households in seeking to improve their lives.

All of the evidence from the fieldwork indicated that context matters, and that there were distinct differences between villages and provinces. The Faryab study concluded that "context is very important to livelihoods—village context, as well as district and provincial context."[3] The Badakhshan study went further:

> *The study draws attention to the corporate nature of villages...[and] their capacity to manage themselves and provide public goods... which the Afghan state and markets have failed to deliver. But village capacity to fulfil this role is variable...to a degree the concept of path dependency explains village trajectories; individuals, history and ecology have all influenced, in a determinate way, pathways of change.[4]*

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1   This comment draws from the evaluation experiences of several NGO programmes over the last five years.

2   G. Wood and I. Gough, "A Comparative Welfare Regime Approach to Global Social Policy," *World Development* 34, no. 10 (2004): 1696-1712.

3   Batul Nezami with Paula Kantor, "Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories: Evidence from Faryab" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2010), 1.

4   Adam Pain, "Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories: Evidence from Badakhshan" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2010), vii.

The character of the Kandahar villages, particularly with respect to the behaviour of the village elites and village provision of public goods, contrasted strongly with those of Badakhshan, raising questions about the causes of such differences.[5]

What is "context?" For the purposes of this paper, it is defined as the existing social order, as determined by the organisation of society and the ways in which economic, political and social systems contribute to that organisation.[6] The paper focuses on lower-level social orders—those of the village and its immediate environment—and in so doing incorporates geography and place as key structural components. There are compelling reasons to focus on the local level, since it is the primary context in which most rural Afghans live and the durable institutions of Afghanistan's landscape—the village and the household—are to be found. The extent to which the village can be considered an institution is discussed in more detail in Section 3.

The key contextual factors investigated by this paper include location, village resources, and associated social and political relations.[7] Other factors include the immediate environment of the village and the social relations within it, the position of the village in relation to the district, the location of the district in relation to the province, and the position of the province within the wider political dynamics of Afghanistan. These locational aspects of context are also linked to other processes associated with shifting markets (opium poppy, for example), reconstruction efforts, insecurity and climate effects (for example, drought), all of which exist within the wider environment of the state-building exercise in Afghanistan.

A companion paper investigates the relationship between village contexts and social welfare outcomes and draws attention to the ways in which welfare outcomes for households are affected by village social orders.[8] This paper is instead concerned with exploring the evidence of differences between villages, the factors determining these differences and their relevance to programme design and impact.

In part because of resource constraints, programming practice in Afghanistan has rarely focused on village variability during the design stage, even if such differences have had to be addressed to manage implementation during the operational stage. Many of the implicit theories of change that underlie programme design—for example, the role of formal microcredit in bringing households into the market and out of poverty, or the role of community development in mobilising village household demand for services and self-management—pay little attention to what exists already. Preconditions are not seen to matter; if implementers stumble across them, they are often considered as neutral or as obstacles to implementation. Measures that focus on delivery activities or outputs based on simple indicators that can be easily counted are often used to claim programme success. Less attention is paid to outcomes or impact. For example, in the case of microcredit, evaluations tend to focus on the number of loans given and repaid; insufficient attention has been paid to the uses of loans, how they are repaid and the benefits derived from them, as well as the consequences of those benefits and the way they interact with existing informal systems of credit.[9]

Similarly, as will be further discussed in Sections 3 and 4, the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) implementation process appears to have paid little attention to variability in village preconditions and the presence and performance of existing

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5   Adam Pain, "Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories: Evidence from Kandahar" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2010).

6   Douglas C. North, John Joseph Wallis, Steven B. Webb and Barry R. Weingast, "Limited Access Orders in the Developing World: A New Approach to the Problems of Development," Policy Research Working Paper 4359 (Washington DC: The World Bank, 2007), 47.

7   The term "location" is used to describe not only the physical aspects of location but also the political, social and economic position of the village in relation to the wider world.

8   Paula Kantor and Adam Pain, *Securing Life and Livelihoods in Rural Afghanistan: The Role of Social Relationships* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2010).

9   Paula Kantor, *From Access to Impact: Microcredit and Rural Livelihoods in Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2009).

customary authorities. Measures of programme performance have focused more on the formation of committees, democratic elections and the preparation of project proposals than on the actual effects of these activities. Likewise, such measures often have not considered the extent to which the effects of implementation might be determined by preconditions.[10]

Programming has been based on the hope that interventions will rapidly achieve a transformation of village social orders and, in the process, simplify the pre-existing village context. However, there are good reasons to believe such transformations will not happen quickly or easily, and that context will continue to matter.

1.2 Four good reasons to be interested in analysing context

Four reasons are given here to justify an interest in systematically analysing context at the regional and village levels. First, commentary on Afghanistan has a tendency to emphasise either the absence of a (semi-) functioning state or the problems facing its construction. These problems are seen as associated with chronic conflict, an insurgency in the South, the workings of an opium economy, and a government based on patronage relationships rather than the impersonal, rule-bound system expected by donors.

Ambitions for Afghanistan, however, are quickly being scaled back, and the current environment of chronic conflict and instability is likely to continue. The situation can be described as one in which political elites have divided control of the country and the economy between them and maintain an uneasy truce in the form of a coalition. This has been characterised as a basic limited access order, in which elites control resources and personal connections are needed to access them (this is contrasted with the open access orders of the West and the impersonal and competitive relations of

Western democracies and markets, which allow for greater equality of access).[11] It should not be assumed that a limited access order is inherently unstable. Guistozzi's account of some state-like characteristics of key Afghan warlords' territory, such as with Ismail Khan in Herat that included limited public good provision, is consistent with a limited access order model.[12] Yet even if this is too pessimistic an assessment, and ground is being gained in Afghanistan's transition, history teaches us that transformations from limited to open access orders are not quick, easy or linear.[13] History also shows that such transformations largely depend on the elites seeing their own interests served by providing greater access to resources. Therefore achieving a transformation to an open access order requires attention to the existing institutional landscape and the social order that it achieves, especially at the village level.

The second reason for considering village context is directly linked to the first. In the post-2001 period, a humanitarian agenda drove the initial response and was based on assumptions of destruction and disaster, even if the field evidence did not support such an interpretation.[14] While there was evidence of chronic malnutrition, very little acute malnutrition could be found. In addition, grain markets did not fail, and claims of availability failure did not hold true. Claims about an absence of credit also were not supported by the evidence.[15] In short, there was and is much more resilience—based partially on informal structures working at

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10 The term "effects" is used in this paper to capture both short-term effects (outcomes) and long-term effects (impact), as well as unintended effects.

11 North et al., "Limited Access Orders."

12 Antonio Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud: Wars and Warlords in Afghanistan* (London: Hurst, 2009).

13 D. North, J. Wallis and B. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

14 A. Pain and J. Sutton, "Introduction: Reconstructing Agriculture in Afghanistan," in *Reconstructing Agriculture in Afghanistan*, ed. A. Pain and J. Sutton, 1-10 (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization and Practical Action, 2007).

15 S. Rasmusson, "The Current Situation of Rural Finance in Afghanistan," http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTAFGHANISTAN/Resources/AFRFW_2_Rural_Credit_Initiatives.htm, 8 December 2004 (accessed August 15 2010).

the village level—than has been acknowledged.[16] To a certain degree, the strength of such informal structures may exist precisely because of the long history of conflict and problematic state behaviour. This justifies paying greater attention to the informal order that exists in Afghanistan and the key location—the village—where customary institutions are to be found. However, little attention has been paid—either in the state-building exercise or in understanding the effects of conflict—to the durable institutions in Afghanistan's landscape, notably the household, village and *qawm* (social group), and the roles that they might play in providing public goods.

The third and perhaps most critical reason, which is discussed in more detail in Section 4, is that customary institutions, given their strength in Afghan society, cannot necessarily be easily or quickly displaced by new organisational arrangements introduced from the outside. Rather, as will become evident, new organisational arrangements are likely to become subject to institutions already in place.

The fourth reason for considering context and contextual changes is that much of the language and policy prescription for poverty reduction in Afghanistan is highly individualised. Poverty reduction is explained in terms of what individuals can do to "escape from poverty" and how their situations are determined independently by their strategies and actions. Thus the correlates of poverty—few assets, poor health and low income, for example—are viewed as the causes of poverty. This fails to take into account the structures that create poverty and give rise to deep inequalities. Therefore an effective analysis of poverty must investigate the structures that given rise to poverty differences—within the village, between villages, between districts and between provinces.

This paper will argue that there is great variability in the character of both villages and higher social orders, and that these variations affect the ways in which programmes can engage with villages and the outcomes they achieve. There is, therefore, a strong case to be made for the analysis of context, as well as the application of this analysis to programme design, implementation and evaluation processes. A programming approach that builds on what exists is more likely to achieve sustainable benefits than one that ignores it.

1.3   Methods

This paper draws on evidence from a small number of case studies, taken from 11 village contexts. It seeks to investigate complex causal relations, which are difficult to study with large samples and statistical approaches.[17] Qualitative research methods were chosen because they provide a depth that statistically representative approaches cannot achieve, and also because the concepts of causal structures and determinants of outcomes observed do not fit well with the assumptions required to employ standard regression techniques on large samples.[18]

The context studies followed a common approach in three of the provinces (Badakhshan, Sar-i-Pul and Faryab) and were based on preliminary visits to the provinces, districts and villages. However, it was not possible to pursue them to equal depth in all provinces, with the Badakhshan study achieving the greatest penetration. In Kandahar, these visits were not possible, and a detailed discussion was instead held with a group of elders from the two villages, as well as a context-focused debriefing of the two male and female field teams that conducted the household interviews. In Faryab, the initial context study could not be followed up through the detailed household interviews due to insecurity. Instead, fieldwork focused on the village level and explored the effects of two major events of the recent past: drought and an upsurge in insurgent activity.

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16   Floortje Klijn and Adam Pain, *Finding the Money: Informal Credit Practices in Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2007).

17   The term "causal" in this paper implies that there are causal possibilities, rather than proof of a causal link or its significance.

18   Peter Hall, "Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Research," in *Comparative-Historical Analysis in Social Sciences*, eds. James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, 373-404 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 375.

Data on each context was collected from various sources—secondary sources, government authorities at provincial and district levels, key informants at provincial and district levels, and groups of elders in the key villages. These were supplemented by field observations on location and landscape. Data was collected on provincial, district and village history, geography and economy over the last 30 years, focusing on the pre-1978, 1978-2001 and post-2001 periods. Discussion focused on the changing roles and actions of village authorities, provision of public goods, key actors, and relations between villages and districts. Researchers sought accounts of the dynamics of security and insecurity, means of achieving security and their effects on village lives. Discussions also explored key themes including the rise and fall of the opium economy, conflict, and issues of resource access.

1.4   Structure of the paper

The paper proceeds by exploring, in Section 2, aspects of the history of Afghanistan specifically related to the deep structural contrasts between regions. These contrasts are discussed in general and then in relation to the four administrative provinces in which the study was carried out—Kandahar, Badakhshan, Sar-i-Pul and Faryab. Section 3 then examines in detail the village as an analytical unit, and the extent to which it can be considered an institution. It then makes the case that it is useful to consider individual villages as "village republics," each with distinctive patterns of behaviour, historical trajectories and capacities to produce public goods. These concepts are explored using the empirical data from each of the 11 study villages.

Section 4 investigates in more detail the significance of variation between villages and its potential impact on programme outcomes. The section includes a further examination of customary village structures, their capacities to deliver public goods and the potential determinants of variability. It then outlines a framework for capturing some key dimensions of village variability that can be used in programme analysis. The final section draws together the argument and its implication for programming practice.

2. The Relevance of Regional Identities

2.1   Introduction

This section explores and analyses the similarities and contrasts between the four provinces (Kandahar, Badakhshan, Sar-i-pul and Faryab) where the fieldwork on which this paper is based was undertaken. There are obvious differences in landscape, natural resources and culture between them. One can contrast, for example, the irrigated plain and rich agricultural economy of Kandahar with the mountainous grain deficit economy of Badakhshan. There are also cultural differences based on ethnic identities. However, such contrasts do not consider whether these differences exist within similar or different social orders. In addition, simply pointing to distinct regional identities carries the danger of seeing them as determined by geography, when such differences may have been developed, and continue to evolve, in relation to each other through the processes of state formation in Afghanistan over the last 200 years.

Robert Putnam famously and controversially pointed to the social order contrasts between southern and northern Italy to argue that a rich associational life in the north was linked to democratic outcomes, while its absence in the south was an obstacle to democratic development.[19] While there has been fierce criticism of Putnam's methods and argument,[20] the significance and long-term effects of distinct regional identities, whatever their causes, is not in doubt. As geography and history continue to shape the present, regional identities continue to play a major role in shaping life in Afghanistan.

This is the case, in part, because such identities reflect regional economies and their linkages to the wider national economy. Yet regional identities are also political, given the distinct spatial distribution of ethnic groups within Afghanistan. Regional identities are closely linked to political contention with the Afghan state, the ways in which the Afghan state has related to the regions and the degree to which regions have been willing to engage with state. Regional identities have also led to the creation of deeper contrasts: As will be seen, the long-term social and political dividends of Badakhshan's early investment in education stand in stark comparison to Kandahar's lack of investment. Thus history matters in the way that past events continue to impact the engagement of regions and their elites in the processes of state formation. Given the extent to which villages are located in and dependent on connections to the regional political economy, village social orders have to be understood within their regional contexts.

Observations on the deep structural contrasts between regions in Afghanistan are not new; this section now reviews the existing literature on the relevance of understanding regional identities in Afghanistan before moving on to examine the specific identities of the four study provinces. Although the terms "province" and "district" will be used in this section, it must be recognised that these are administrative categories and do not necessarily draw the boundaries of distinctive regional identities. More often, the creation of new provinces carved out of larger ones has been a result of complex negotiations between political elites. This is partially due to attempts by the central government in Kabul to slowly reduce the size of provinces in order to limit the powers of provincial administrators. However, it has also been part of a process of political accommodation and provision of patronage. President Mohammad Najibullah created the new Uzbek-dominated province of Sar-i-Pul out of Balkh after 1989 to secure the support of Abdul Rashid Dostum after the Soviet Union left. President Hamid Karzai's creation of the new province of Panjsher after 2001

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19   Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ, USA: Princeton University Press, 1993).

20   John Harriss, *Depoliticizing Development: The World Bank and Social Capital* (London, Anthem Press: 2002).

reflected a similar process. A process of district creation based on securing political support can also be identified at the provincial level.[21]

2.2 The long history of regional identities

Regional identities and their durability are central to Thomas Barfield's account of Afghanistan's political and cultural history.[22] He identifies four major regions:

> They can be most easily identified by their ancient urban centres: Herat in the west, Qandahar in the south, Balkh (Mazar-i-Sharif) in the north and Kabul in the east. Peshawar and the NWFP [North-West Frontier Province] constitute a fifth region, Afghanistan's phantom limb that was bequeathed to Pakistan when the British departed. Each of these regions dominates well-irrigated plains or river valleys that produce great agricultural surpluses, and have supported urban life for millennia. All had their own fluctuating frontiers in terms of how much of their adjacent mountain, steppe and desert hinterland they controlled. But each survives and remerges as a distinct region no matter the changes in political organisation, arrivals of new populations or religions, or attempts to impose larger and more uniform identities on them.[23]

The most forceful attempt to weld these regional identities into a state was undertaken by Abdur Rahman, who used force to achieve a supremacy over regional elites. However, the underlying regional social orders did not disappear. Subsequent to his rule the specific identities, regional interests and regional resistance to a central state re-emerged, albeit in new forms. They continued to make themselves felt until 1978, when they were dramatically rejuvenated by resistance to the Soviet occupation. By the time of the Taliban,

distinct regional economies and political centres reflecting Barfield's characterisation marked Afghanistan. These have persisted into the post-2001 era, reinforced by patterns of resistance to the Kabul government, patronage given by President Karzai and donor funding practices. One aspect of this pattern has been the emergence of regional strongmen or warlords out of the legacy of Soviet resistance and the political turbulence of the 1990s, who have created state-like entities at the regional level.[24]

Barfield's view of the natural "stable climax state in the 'political ecology' of Afghanistan" is characterised by a political centre (which historically has moved between Kandahar and Kabul—during the time of the Taliban it was in Kandahar) dominating distinct regions, each of which have had their own political elites. This view is consistent with the characterisation of Afghanistan as a natural or basic limited access order state, where a political equilibrium between competing elites has been reached without a central state achieving an overall monopoly of power, force or revenue collection.[25]

There is an additional dimension underlying Barfield's description of regional structures and the variability within and between them. He draws from the work of Ibn Khaldun, a medieval Arab social historian, to point to the deep structural contrasts between geographically marginal areas (deserts or mountains) and the intensively irrigated plains, which are densely populated and economically complex.[26] The more marginal areas have been characterised by subsistence-based economies, low population densities and relatively equitable, less hierarchical social structures with strong group solidarities. In contrast, the irrigated plain settlements generate agricultural surplus and are characterised by much greater levels of social inequality, based on the ownership of land and strong social hierarchies. As will be seen, Badakhshan and

21   Pain, "Evidence from Badakhshan" 10.

22   Thomas Barfield, A*fghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010).

23   Barfield, *Afghanistan, 48-49*.

24   Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud*.

25   North et al., *Violence and Social Orders*.

26   Muhummad Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: an introduction to history,* ed N.J.Dawood, trans Fanz Rosenthal (Princteon, N.J: Princeton Press, 1969), cited in Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 56-57.

Sar-i-Pul fall into the category of marginal areas; Kandahar fits that of an agriculturally rich and hierarchically-based society; and Faryab, by virtue of its settlement history, occupies an intermediary position. As will be discussed in Section 3, these differences have influenced the nature of the corporate structures found in the villages.

However, it has been argued that despite this contrast there has been a historically strong interdependency between the development of mountain and plains people.[27] Among the mountain people there has been an intentional strategy of remaining ungoverned, and the retreat to altitude and persistence of residence there has often been a deliberate escape from the reach of the plain, where the state has been located. In turn, the state and the plain economies have kept at a distance from the mountain people, and have only engaged with them militarily or politically when they have threatened the status quo. This argument is drawn from an analysis of Southeast Asia, where by 1950 the historically marginal mountain economies had been largely drawn into the state, with the possible exception of the opium-growing economies of the Golden Triangle. In the case of Afghanistan, the process of state enclosure of the mountain economies is far from complete; its mountain regions still remain committed to the ungoverned aspects of their identity in cultural and psychological terms, even if they might be making strategic and political claims on Kabul. In the current shifting political landscape, regions have continued to maintain, through their political elites, the ability to negotiate terms of recognition in an intentional manner, seeking pragmatic benefits from a potentially emerging state and donors, while at the same time maintaining independence.

In summary, the distinctive regional identities found in Afghanistan contain two interrelated core elements that are fundamental to understanding the dynamics of change within them, and which have important implications for programmatic design and outcomes. The first is the degree of social inequality, how it varies by location and its implications for public good provision. The second is the political positioning of the regional political elites in relation to the state and their commitment to a state-building agenda. Linked to both are opportunities for building more secure livelihoods for the people of the different regions. These issues are now pursued through a specific examination of the four provinces.

2.3 Four provinces compared

The four provinces of Badakhshan, Kandahar, Sar-i-Pul and Faryab are fundamentally different in terms of their geography, political history, distribution of social inequalities and economy, as well as the commitment of their political elites to the centralising forces of state-building. Table 1 schematically draws out some of these contrasts, which are further explored below.

Prior to 2001

Badakhshan, located in the northeast of Afghanistan, is essentially a mountain economy characterised by remoteness, economic marginality and a historical grain deficit, but also a significant livestock economy. There is a long history of seasonal wage labour migration to other provinces and out of the country. Economically, the province has long depended on resources from elsewhere. It also has one of the highest poverty rates of any Afghan province. It is populated largely by Tajiks and Uzbeks, who are primarily Sunni Muslims. Other small linguistic groups, many of whom are Ismaili, also proliferate in the remoter districts. There was an early investment in education, beginning in the 1950s and perhaps driven by the lack of opportunities within the province. The presence of an educated elite in the province prior to 1978 is widely reported and was key to transforming the province's historical political marginality.[28] The elite came to play an important role in the formation of many of the leftist parties during the 1970s, as well as in the establishment of Badakhshan's position in the conflicts from 1978 until after 2001.

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27 James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009).

28 Antonio Giustozzi and Dominique Orsini, "Centre-Periphery Relations in Afghanistan: Badakhshan between Patrimonialism and Institution Building," *Central Asian Survey* 28, no. 1 (2009): 1-16.

The period from 1978-2001 in Badakhshan can be divided into two phases. The first lasted from 1978 until the fall of President Najibullah and the capture of Kabul by mujahiddin forces in 1992.

Afghanistan. The city has been a major trading centre because of both its agriculturally rich hinterland of irrigated fruit orchards along the Arghandab River and its proximity to the Pakistani border.

Table 1: Four provinces compared

Province	Geography and Economy	Major Ethnic Group	Political History and Actors	Opium Economy	Social Inequalities
Badakhshan	Borderland; marginal mountain economy	Tajik	Opposition to Taliban and Karzai	Significant	Medium
Kandahar	Borderland; intensively irrigated plain agriculture	Pashtun	Karzai stronghold and opposition to Taliban	Significant	Large
Sar-i-Pul	Marginal foothill economy	Largely Uzbek	Marginal	Moderate	Small
Faryab	Borderland; foothill and plain economy; downstream	Mixed	Marginal	Slight	Medium

This period was characterised by conflict between both the government and its opposition, and among the mujahiddin; all of the study villages reported fighting during this period, although with different levels of engagement.[29] The second phase saw the rise of Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Massoud—whose political base was in the Panjsher, a historical point of access to Badakhshan—as key players in the government. This phase lasted until 1996, when the Taliban captured Kabul. Rabbani and Massoud then established themselves in opposition to the Taliban in Badakhshan and the Panjsher, holding out until the Taliban fell from power in late 2001.[30] Therefore, although Badakhshan has been economically marginal to Afghanistan's history, it came to play a central role in the political turmoil beginning in 1978 and continuing post-2001 due to the presence of key political figures.

In contrast, the southern province of Kandahar, which includes Kandahar city and is largely Pashtun, has always been central to the political history of

The Pashtun tribal structure, and its configuration within the province, is central to understanding the politics of Kandahar. The dominant tribal alliance has been the Zirak Durrani, comprised of five tribes, of which the Popalzai and Barakzai have been the most significant.[31] There has also been a subordinate grouping of the Panjpai Durrani, of which the most significant tribes have been the Noorzai and Alizai. These two tribal alliances have been characterised by internal divisions and rivalry, as well as cross-alliance competition, and the power play between the Popalzai and the Barakzai has been central to the politics of post-2001 Kandahar.

Prior to 1978, the position of traditional village and tribal leaders in Pashtun society in Kandahar was strongly hierarchical, with strong patron-client relations (as will be seen, this is a feature of the two study villages in Kandahar).[32] The revolution of 1978 fractured the existing order, leading to a reconfiguration of the old tribal social hierarchy and considerable conflict. The mujahiddin war produced two specific outcomes. The

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29 Pain, "Evidence from Badakhshan."

30 Massoud was killed in 2001.

31 Antonio Giustozzi and Noor Ullah, "The Inverted Circle: Kabul and the Strongmen's Competition for Control over Kandahar, 2001-2006," Central Asian Survey 26, no. 2 (2007): 167-184.

32 Giustozzi and Ullah, "The Inverted Circle."

first was that different tribes aligned with competing mujahiddin parties, with the Popalzai and Barakzai siding with the royalist opposition, while others tended to support anti-royalist parties or the more radical Islamists, notably Hizb-i-Islami. The second outcome was migration—many of the study households either left their villages for Kandahar city or migrated to Pakistan, where they stayed for a decade.

After 1992 and the fall of President Najibullah, new strongmen—none of whom came from the traditional *khan* (landlord) elite, and who showed limited inclination to accept the social responsibilities of the traditional *khans*—seized control of their respective tribes.[33] The withdrawal of external funding and resulting competition for limited resources led to an emerging anarchy and generated the conditions for the emergence of the Taliban. The security regime established by the Taliban resulted in many of the strongmen disappearing into exile, and the period from 1994-98 (before the long drought of 1998-2004 took hold) is remembered as a time of relative prosperity and security. It also saw the rise of opium poppy cultivation in Kandahar.

While Sar-i-Pul Province has much in common with Badakhshan as a hill or mountain economy, it has always been and remains a politically and economically marginal region, peripheral to Balkh.[34] Originally part of other provinces, it only gained provincial status in 1988, as part of a strategy by President Najibullah to secure the allegiance of the Uzbek leader Rashid Dostum. It is also not located on an international border, in contrast to the other three provinces. Until recently, educational resources remained limited to district centres. With fewer water resources than Badakhshan, it has had a rain-fed grain and livestock economy; in the past there was also a significant dried fruit economy, which has now declined. The long drought from 1998-2004 hit the agrarian economy there particularly hard, leading to a collapse in the livestock population; consequently, Sar-i-Pul has one of the highest levels of food insecurity in

Afghanistan. The result is a long history of seasonal migration, both internationally and to the irrigated economies of the Turkmen plains Migration and urban employment have become the major sources of income for most households.

The province is ethnically diverse, although Uzbeks are the largest ethnic group. There are distinct spatial patterns of settlement: the Hazaras are largely located in the higher altitudes in the south of the province, while Tajiks, Uzbeks, and other small groups including Pashtuns and Arabs are located in the lower-lying north of the province. During the Soviet occupation, the province was a location of considerable resistance, but with diverse mujahiddin groups largely aligned along ethnic divisions. In the north, the conflict led to considerable internal displacement, as well as migration out of the country. During the time of the Taliban, the southern parts of the province remained a location of resistance.

As with Sar-i-Pul, Faryab was for a long period a sub-province of Balkh, but it achieved provincial status earlier, in 1964. However, from 1988-98 its northern districts were transferred to the jurisdiction of Jawzjan Province, which was under the control of Dostum and his political party, Junbesh. Its southern districts lie in the foothills of the Hindu Kush, but the northern districts stretch into the Turkmen plains. The river systems of Faryab have traditionally played an important role in the economy of the province, with the Ab-i-Qaysar flowing some 320 kilometres from the mountains, north through Qaysar onto the Turkmen plains near Dawlatabad. However, the river dies out before reaching the Amu Darya River, tapped for its final resources by the irrigated lands around Andkhoy. The economy of Faryab has traditionally been based on agricultural produce and associated industries—sheep, karakul skins and leather, wool and carpets—and in the past has been grain self-sufficient, with significant exports of skins and carpets.

Turkmen and Uzbeks are the major ethnic groups of the province, with the Turkmen settled mainly in the north. Although there has been a long history of Pashtun Kuchi movement in and out of the province,

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33   Guistozzi and Ullah, "The Inverted Circle."

34   Tom Shaw, "Afghanistan Livelihood Trajectories: Evidence from Sar-i-Pul" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2010).

their settlement stemmed from strategic initiatives of Abdur Rahman as he centralised control of Afghanistan. The ethnic fault lines that emerged among competing parties after the Soviets left were exacerbated once the Taliban took power in the North.[35]

There has been a long history of education in Faryab. In Andkhoy and Maymana, the provincial capital, the first primary schools were established in the 1920s and education spread beginning in the 1930s. Education for girls was instituted early—by 1975, 40 percent of the schools in Maymana were for girls.[36] Maymana is reported to have had one of the highest rates of students of admitted to Kabul University. In Andkhoy a primary school for girls was opened in 1957 and remained open until 1998.

The war years were characterised by considerable conflict between government forces and the mujahiddin, as well as between the mujahiddin parties. This led to the emergence of provincial strongmen, notably Rasul Pahlawan, who ruthlessly established control over key parts of the province. This contributed to rising ethnic tensions between the Uzbeks and Turkmen on one side, and the Pashtuns on the other.[37] From 1992 until the Taliban took the North in 1998, there was considerable instability fuelled by shifting relations between Dostum and his Junbesh party on one side, and Rasul Pahlawan and, after his assassination in 1996, his brothers on the other. The seizure of the North by the Taliban led to a reversal of sectarian control, with Pashtuns gaining the upper hand.

Provincial contrasts

There are, then, several points of contrast between the provinces. From a geographical perspective,

Kandahar and Faryab, with their irrigated plain land and agricultural surplus, can be contrasted with Badakhshan and Sar-i-Pul, both of which have a greater rain-fed component to their agriculture and a less reliable agrarian economy. In the area of social identities, Kandahar and Badakhshan can be grouped, each having a single dominant ethnic group, while both Sar-i-Pul and Faryab are more ethnically mixed due to historical factors including the enforced settlement of people from the South. Politically, both Kandahar and Badakhshan have developed strong identities combined with their geographic characteristics. In Kandahar this is due to its centrality to state-making processes and the state itself. In the case of Badakhshan, the province's political identity is possibly a result of its distinctive mountainous characteristics and its size, which may have contributed to a clear sense of regional identity and the emergence of an educated elite. In contrast, both Sar-i-Pul and Faryab have been more "in-between" places, located in the foothills between the mountains of the Hindu Kush, with its distinctive Hazara identity, and the rich plain economy of Balkh. Both have thus been peripheral to national politics and have never established strong political identities, despite having been fought over in the past.

Post-2001

The four provinces have followed very different trajectories since 2001. In the case of Sar-i-Pul, its economic and political marginalisation has continued. Economically peripheral as a mountain hinterland, lacking figures of significance at either provincial or the national level, and without a significant opium economy or insurgency to attract international attention, it has remained "a forgotten province," receiving one of the lowest amounts of international and government funding.[38] A continuing drought has kept many households in chronic food insecurity. There has also been a gradual rise in insecurity, particularly within the study district of Sayyad.

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35   Such divisions have historical roots dating back to the previous century. There are few records of Turkmen or Uzbeks reaching high political or military office prior to the 1970s, despite their high levels of education.

36   Adam Pain, "Livelihoods under Stress in Faryab, Northern Afghanistan," A Report to Save the Children USA, Pakistan/Afghanistan Field Office (Islamabad: Save the Children USA, 2001).

37   Nezami with Kantor, "Evidence from Faryab."

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38   Shaw, "Evidence from Sar-i-Pul," 8; Matt Waldman, "Falling Short: Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan," ACBAR Advocacy Series (Kabul: Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief, 2008).

Both Badakhshan and Kandahar, in different ways, have remained politically significant to President Karzai. Badakhshan has been a location of continuing political opposition, through the presence of Rabbani and his political supporters, which he has sought to neutralise through patrimonial politics. Kandahar on the other hand has served as his main political support base, but is also a locus of opposition through the Taliban insurgency.

Badakhshan during the period from 2002-05 has been characterised as "a system of regulated anarchy... where a degree of stability was maintained through a balance of power," and in which Rabbani and his party, Jamiat-i-Islami, maintained a weak and decentralised patrimonial system.[39] Disarmament was far from complete, as much of the jostling for power centred on control of the opium trade and its profits. One source estimated that during this time, between 70 and 75 percent of the province was under the control of a loose alliance of local military leaders, while 10 to 15 percent was partially under state control and 10 to 15 percent was totally outside of state control.[40] Beginning in 2005, President Karzai increasingly intervened in Badakhshan "to replace local systems of power and patronage...with an alternative one dependent on Kabul."[41] This involved supporting Zalmay Khan, a local politician with a history of shifting political alliances. He is widely seen as prioritising his own interests, and is reported to have intervened to ensure that he maintained control of district administrator and police chief appointments.[42]

Following the fall of the Taliban and their loss of Kandahar as their power centre, the United States military presence there and its campaign against al Qaeda and the Taliban leadership rapidly drove the use of external patronage in local politics. The US initially supported Gul Agha Sherzai, the Barakzai tribal leader, allowing him to gain control of key revenue sources including the Spin Boldak border post.[43] This supplied him with sufficient resources to provide patronage, maintain political support and promote his tribal followers in the provincial administration. The corruption and incompetence by Gul Agha Sherzai's administration allowed Ahmad Wali Karzai, President Karzai's brother, to gradually build his political position and oust Sherzai. Wali Karzai was able to gain power as president of the provincial council and thus control provincial politics. With Wali Karzai's ascendancy, members of the Popolzai tribe gained control of the provincial administration. External patronage from Kabul and the short-term interests of international actors have also played a critical role in local-level tribal dynamics.

Both Badakhshan and Kandahar have also been centres for the opium economy. In the case of Badakshan, its area of opium cultivation rose after 2001 and led to a period of unprecedented prosperity for its mountain economy, from which the three study villages benefited to varying degrees. By 2006 it had fallen back, due to both declining terms of trade for the crop and counter-narcotic measures.[44] Kandahar has also had a history of opium cultivation, and cultivation continues, although it is now confined to less secure districts; however, Kandahar's role as a national trading centre for the crop has become more significant. A dynamic urban economy has grown, fuelled in part by the opium trade, but reinforced by a reconstruction economy to which the international presence has contributed. The growth of the city economy has had a significant impact on employment in the two Kandahar study villages.[45]

Since 2001, Faryab has been characterised by continuing rivalry between Jamiat and Junbesh, sometimes erupting into open violence between

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39   Guistozzi and Orsini, "Centre-Periphery Relations."

40   J. Kohler, "Assessing Peace and Conflict Potential in the Target Region of the GTZ Central Asia and Northern Afghanistan Programme to Foster Food Security, Regional Cooperation and Stability" (Berlin: Analysis Research Consulting and GTZ, 2004).

41   Giustozzi and Orsini, "Centre-Periphery Relations," 11.

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

43   Giustozzi and Ullah, "The Inverted Circle," 172.

44   Adam Pain, "Opium and Informal Credit" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2008).

45   Pain, "Evidence from Kandahar."

militias. There have also been divisions within Junbesh, with a reformist wing seeking to marginalise the party's armed wing. Attempts to bring Faryab into the orbit of the central government through strategic appointments of governors have largely foundered, due to political or administrative weakness of the governors and the shifting relationship between Dostum and the central government. The result has been a political vacuum that has favoured the rise of local strongmen, funding themselves through predation on local populations. In addition, there has been a gradual penetration of the Taliban, contributing to a rising climate of physical insecurity in the past two years. This has been superimposed on a gradually declining rural economy, caused in part by drought, but also attributable to major unresolved issues of water distribution within the province.

2.4 Conclusion: Regional contexts contrasted

It is evident that these four provinces are positioned very differently in relation to Kabul. The province with the least presence and political value, not least because of the limited economic rent that can be extracted from it, is Sar-i-Pul. This is partially due to its location as a hinterland, between mountain and plain, largely rain-fed and lacking an international border. It will likely remain peripheral and marginal to Balkh Province for the foreseeable. It is a forgotten place of limited political interest to the central government, regional players and donors, and one which suffers from acute structural poverty.

The other three provinces all offer greater political and economic resources, and all lie on an international border. Faryab appears to gain the least in terms of trade revenue from its position, although in the past it has been significant in supporting the political position of Dostum. The geographical centre of the North lies in Balkh and

Mazar-i-Sharif, and not in Faryab; while power remains contested in Faryab, the contention is not central to the position of Mazar (Faryab may matter more to General Dostum, based in Shibirghan, whose political position remains uncertain). As a result, there has not been a political settlement between the political elite in the province, and instability is likely to remain.

Badakhshan, in contrast, has considerable economic and political resources, controlled by a narrow elite. This is due to its opium economy, trade in natural resources, location on the border of Tajikistan and donor interest. The rise of Zalmay Khan, its most recent key political player, has been fuelled by patrimonial support from Kabul rather than a wide Badakhshani political base. While this has enabled him to capture key economic rents (such as central funding and resources) and thus build patronage networks within the province, it remains unclear whether he will be able to maintain control of resources, or whether he will continue to receive external support into the future. Economic and political stability are still contested in Badakhshan, and are likely to remain so.

Kandahar, by virtue of both its location and its economic resources, remains the richest economic and political resource. For the present, it is strongly allied to Kabul, but it also faces the greatest political and military challenge from the insurgency. It is also the most hierarchical and unequal of the four provinces; Barfield argues that these conditions in the past have given rise to strong and durable leadership, although this seems less likely to happen now.

Regional identities continue to be significant as underlying social orders reworking themselves in post-2001 Afghanistan. The following section will discuss the positioning of villages within these regional identities, and the extent to which village identities are they consistent with them.

3. Village Republics: The Evidence for Village Social Orders

3.1 Introduction

This section focuses on the village as a key analytical unit in understanding context. Many non-governmental organisation (NGO) and government field staff comment that villages can vary, quite markedly over very short distances, in their socioeconomic characteristics and behaviour, even within culturally homogenous zones. One village may be particularly conservative in its attitude toward women, in contrast with another in the area, and some villages are more NGO-friendly than others. Likewise, one village in an area might be seen as "progressive," while another is characterised as "traditional." Often one village will be held up as an example or "success story" in relation to a particular intervention.

Underlying these descriptions is an intention on the part of international actors to bring villages into the modern world and out of their tradition-burdened past. Louis Dupree's assertion that "the village builds a 'mud curtain' around itself for protection against the outside world" reflects an attitude that sees the village as a symbol of rural backwardness and tradition.[46] However, as this section will argue, it may be more accurate to view the village, in contrast to the state, as a more enduring part of Afghanistan's institutional landscape. Afghanistan's villages can be understood as village republics capable of providing key public goods of security and dispute-resolution, and sometimes more, in a context where these have been largely absent.[47]

The case will be made that villages as institutions have a local social order and "behaviour," and that some behave better than others. If this is the case, the differences between villages are not simply a matter of curiosity or casual observation.

Rather, village characteristics may be a significant determinant of programme success and, in turn, programme success may be more dependent on village preconditions than on the intervention itself.

Consequently, in addition to developing an understanding of regional differences, an analysis of village preconditions should be a fundamental part of programme design and practice. Understanding these local social orders may very well lead to questions about the foundational assumptions on which programmes rest. The fact that little attention has been paid to Afghan village preconditions has led to formulaic programme practice and "a monotonous landscape of interventions," in which predesigned programme activities are universally applied, regardless of village context. That there should be so little interest in context reflects a lack of awareness, resource constraints and a focus on developing formal organisations such as community development councils (CDCs).[48]

The evidence from the study villages points to the existence of very different village contexts, with major contrasts between regional contexts and significant contrasts within provinces. It is argued that village histories of change, over the last three decades or more, show that villages perform in very different ways. In addition, there seems to be a degree of path dependence explaining this behaviour—actions and decisions taken earlier, as well as accidents of location, history and ecology, have influenced to some degree the paths of change that these villages have followed. Further, these distinct village histories have had implications for the livelihood security of the inhabitants of the villages, and are one explanation for the trajectories that households within the villages have taken and the welfare outcomes they have achieved.

This section first briefly examines the village as a unity of territory, before drawing attention to

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46 Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (Princeton, NJ, USA: Princeton University Press, 1980), 249.

47 Robert Wade, *Village Republics: Economic Conditions for Collective Action in South India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

48 Adam Pain, "Understanding and Monitoring Livelihoods under Conditions of Chronic Conflict: Lessons from Afghanistan," Working Paper 187 (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2002).

comparable evidence of village variability and exploring the concept of village republics. It then examines the empirical evidence from the case studies on village variability, before concluding with a discussion of the significance of this variability.

3.2 The village as a category

Four key institutions can be seen to make up Afghanistan's domestic institutional landscape—the state, the market, the community and the household.[49] These are all entities that establish rules of behaviour and norms of practice, to varying degrees and in different ways, and that moderate the workings and influence of the other institutions. Thus, while the definition of institutions as "rules of the game"[50] applies, institutions must also be seen as products of individual beliefs and expectations about behaviour, and the informal norms and mechanisms through which such rules are enforced.[51] While much of the effort in the state-building project has focused on formal rules and the architecture and performance of the state and its constituent parts, as well as to a lesser degree on markets, the nature of the existing social order has received less attention.

The term "community" as it is used to describe a constituent part of Afghanistan's institutional environment includes everything that is not the state, market or household. Here we focus on the village as one component of that community. The village, however, is not the only socio-spatial structure that exists between the household and the state and market. There are various intermediate institutions, although these vary in significance. Thus structures such as ethnicity, tribe, *qawm* and *mantiqua* may, to varying degrees, unite people across space and carry with them norms and expectations of behaviour. A *qawm* is a form of group solidarity that may be based on

kinship, residence or occupation, and can cross tribal and even ethnic boundaries. A *mantiqua* is a variable unit of social or territorial space that may unite people across villages and, in some circumstances, may have greater meaning than even that of a village.[52] And while villages are formally recognised as an administrative unit, there are also villages that have a de facto existence, formed through processes of new settlement, but may not have achieved official recognition, creating the potential for exclusion from government programmes. Thus the village as an institution can be embedded in other informal institutions and may not necessarily be the most significant institution at the local level, even if it is the most durable and visible.

Is the village an institution? In a strict sense, if one applies the definition of institutions as "rules of the game," the village is not an institution but a place. However, as with markets—which can have a physical identity, as well as being bundles of institutions that govern the conditions and terms under which exchanges take place—the village as a place contains a multitude of institutions that govern behaviour of the people inside it.[53] Therefore the village can be discussed as an institution, in the sense that one can talk of village norms or social order, while recognising its dual identity as a physical place that also has social properties.

The term "community" is commonly used within Afghanistan as an equivalent to "village." But is a community a village, and is a village a community? These terms are often used interchangeably, as if they describe the same entity, but this leads to two problems. First, the term "community" often implies certain norms including democratic values, participation and social transformation—the ideals

49   Wood and Gough, "Comparative Welfare Regime."

50   Douglas North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

51   Avner Greif, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

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

53   Barbara Harriss-White, "On Understanding Markets as Social and Political Institutions in Developing Economies," in *Rethinking Development Economics,* ed. Ha-Joon Chang, 479-96 (London, Chicago and Delhi: Anthem Press, 2003).

of what communities should be.[54] This is closely linked to models of community-driven development, which carry with them intentions of building stronger communities as institutions to engage with the state and market. Thus the term community is not neutral, even when widely used, as it is in the NSP. Second, the NSP definition of "community" is often inconsistent with that of "village." This is largely because NSP practice limits a community to a specific size to fit with programme operational guidelines that are understandably determined by resource constraints. Consequently, a larger village may be artificially divided into two or more "communities" for programme purposes, which may not necessarily be consistent with how the village views its identity. In addition, villages that fall below the minimum threshold size may be clumped together into one community, and there are examples of more than ten villages being combined into one community.

However, as will be seen in the case studies, villages are not always "communities" in the sense of a place with shared values and social solidarities. Thus, while "community" and "village" are often used as loosely interchangeable terms, here the term "village" is used as a more neutral term, describing a unit of residence to which households belong.

3.3   Village republics

This section reviews existing literature to argue that comparative evidence supports the importance of recognising village variability. Key dimensions of this variability include resource endowments, social norms and capacities for collective action, and the determinants of these properties. The evidence is drawn primarily from India, which has a long history as a semi-developmental state.

Starting with the Green Revolution in the 1970s, one long-term study of agrarian change in South India shows that the specific conditions of individual villages are important to understanding the variability of outcomes over time for households

within the villages.[55] Across villages, technical changes favoured larger land-holdings, and for this group there was a high degree of diversification into on-farm, off-farm, and state or urban economy employment. This route was not possible for the land poor. The factors of location and agro-ecological resources were of major importance, however, in explaining patterns of village agrarian change. These factors, where positive, facilitated virtuous paths of growth and, where limiting, prevented it.

The Afghan village is positioned differently in relation to the state. In India, state authority has penetrated to the village level through raising revenue and other administrative arrangements. In contrast, Afghan villages have largely been self-managed institutions in which the state has had limited engagement, as can be seen in the persistence and significance of customary practices that characterise village life.[56] Thus there is an even greater need to consider the ways in which villages are customarily managed and the social orders that they achieve, rather than automatically assuming a state-centric view.[57]

The concept of village republics draws from an investigation of collective action in a group of villages in southern India and the circumstances that gave rise to it.[58] In the study villages, collective action was organised around the provision of goods and services from the scarce grazing land and irrigation water. The collective action supported forms of cooperation and community organisation outside the purview of the state, related to the provision of public goods and to reducing risk of crop loss and social conflict.[59]

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54   A. Agrawal and C.C. Gibson, "Enchantment and Disenchantment: The Role of Community in Natural Resource Conservation," *World Development* 27, no. 4 (1999): 629-49.

55   Barbara Harriss-White and S. Jankarajan, *Rural India Facing the 21st Century: Essays on Long Term Village Change and Recent Development Policy* (London, Chicago and Delhi: Anthem Press, 2004).

56   Thomas Barfield, "Weak Links on a Rusty Chain," in *Revolutions and Rebellions in Afghanistan: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. R. Canfield and N. Shahrani, 139-69 (Berkeley, CA, USA: Institute of International Studies, 1984).

57   Ben Jones, *Beyond the State in Rural Uganda* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

58   Wade, *Village Republics*.

59   A distinction can be made between "pure" public goods—those that cannot be competed for and from which others cannot be

The research drew from two distinct but related strands of scholarship, both of which are relevant to this paper. The first examines the village as a core social institution and investigates its role and capacity to provide collective goods. These studies, undertaken in rural Vietnam and Japan, stress the degree to which collective action and a moral economy manifest themselves in Asian peasant villages; they note the ability of such villages to supply public goods and security for the benefit of village members.[60] In contrast, other research on villages in Vietnam is deeply sceptical about the capacity of villages to undertake collective action and provide social welfare.[61] It argues that villages are characterised by more individualised and entrepreneurial behaviour, with severe limits to cooperative behaviour. As will be seen, both patterns of behaviour were found in the study villages reported on here, with a strong contrast between the more egalitarian structures of the mountains and the deeply hierarchical structures of the plains.

While some of these elements of public good provision recur in the discussion that follows, the more important point to consider is the empirical case and the degree to which some villages appear to be capable of providing public goods, while others do not. It is important to understand why such differences exist and what the consequences are. In the village republic study, it is argued that resource scarcity (of pasture and water) and associated risk provides a considerable incentive to organise. The degree of resource scarcity is seen as a key explanatory variable accounting for differences in

collective action between study villages. However, it is also acknowledged that other factors—such as social structure, demographic composition, and linkages between markets and the behaviour of the local state—are critical factors that might affect collective action. In Afghanistan, the distance of the state prior to 1978 and its role as the enemy in the years that followed are likely to have been even greater incentives for villages to organise themselves to provide key public goods.

3.4 Eleven Afghan villages compared

This section explores key village contrasts, the details of which are summarised in Table 2. While there has been an attempt to construct consistent data sets across the villages, as noted earlier, this has not been achieved; information gaps or differences in the way data is presented are an acknowledged issue. All village names are fictitious in order to ensure anonymity.

The Kandahar villages

Both of the Kandahar study villages lie 10-15 kilometres directly south of Kandahar City in Dand District. The villages are located on an agricultural plain and consist entirely of irrigated land.[62] Kandahar City—a potent mix of a trading centre with a rich agricultural hinterland, a key transit point in relation to the opium economy, a hub in transnational trading links and a reconstruction economy driven by an international presence and war—has offered considerable economic opportunities since 2001, although good connections are required to access the most rewarding opportunities. Proximity to the city and the rise of its economy since 2001 has given households from both villages access to jobs and labour opportunities, and non-farm income sources are important for many of them. Dand District is also relatively secure, due to its proximity to the city, as well as the fact that it is located within Popalzai territory that contains the birth village of President Karzai and is thus closely aligned to the current government. Both study villages are characterised, albeit in different ways, by the presence of a strong

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excluded (fresh air, for example)—and collective or social goods (such as dispute-resolution, education, health and so forth), which can be delivered as private goods but are usually delivered by government. Here the term "public good" is used in a general sense to include security, dispute-resolution, education, etc.

60   James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (New Haven, CT, USA: Yale University Press, 1976); Yujiro Hayami, "Economic Approach to Village Community and Institution," *Journal of Rural Development* 3, no. 1 (1980): 27-49.

61   Samuel Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA, USA: University of California Press, 1979). Popkin's study is focused on a region of recent settlement in the Mekong Delta, in contrast to Scott's research sites in a long-established, densely populated area.

62   Summary data as reported for the other villages could not be collected for the Kandahar villages.

Table 2: Key features of study villages and summary of public goods provided

District	Village (names fictitious)	Features	Public Good Provision
Kandahar			
Dand	Lalakai	Resource rich, but gross inequalities in land-holdings; politically connected	External security through connections; dependent internal security through patron-client relations; limited education
Dand	Julan	Landed elite; resource rich; politically connected	External security through connections; limited internal security; limited education
Badakhshan			
Yamgan	Shur Qul	Resources marginal; long-term support for education; well connected	External and internal security; education; health; water supply
Jurm	Toghloq	Relatively resource rich; politically strong; late starter in education	External security; internally insecure
Jurm	Khilar	Ethnic minority; resources marginal; poorly connected	Dependent external security; internally secure
Sar-i-Pul			
Sayyad	Kushlak	Resource poor; politically marginal	Dependent for external security on Pishin; internal security uncertain
Sayyad	Pishin	Relatively resource rich; locally dominant	Externally and internally secure post-2001
Sayyad	Sarband	Resource poor and land inequalities; absentee landlords; two ethnic groups	Externally secure post-2001; some internal security; peripheral village
Faryab			
Dawlatabad	Chakar	Turkmen; relatively resource rich	Physical security; education
Dawlatabad	Hisaar	Uzbek and Pashtun; land inequalities	Some security and public goods
Dawlatabad	Efroz	Pashtun; downstream, resource poor	Limited security and education

social hierarchy. Features of the hierarchy include a very small elite owning most of the land, a grain surplus, heavy diversification into non-farm income sources, employment through political connections and the display of self-interest.

Regarding the structures of power and land ownership in Lalakai, the following comment was made:

In the villages of Dand, you will not find such a village where the whole land belongs to three families...in other villages there is a malik

system but in our village the main landowner is head of the shura as well.

Although there are two other landowners in the village, the malik (village leader) holds absolute power. He owns over 500 jeribs (a unit approximately equivalent to one-fifth of a hectare) of irrigated land, much of which was reportedly acquired from Hindu traders who fled the city in the 1990s. All of this land is cultivated by sharecroppers, many of whom are recent migrants to the village. They either live in houses that he owns or have built houses on his land. The malik is also well

connected to key members of the provincial council, and his connections reach all the way to the top of government in Kabul. He is widely seen to be pursuing his own interests, although he views himself as acting in the interests of the village. He reported, "When I was head of the NSP [we] constructed a road, which was beneficial for the village...that is why people of our area again requested me to become head of the NSP shura."[63] A village informant spoke for most:

> People say that people came to organise the village to elect shura members but there wasn't any voting process because the malik elected himself and the haji for the shura...this road was only gravelled for his car. We are far from that road and don't have access to it.

When the same informant was asked why they had not elected other people, he responded, "Do not ask this question elsewhere, if he hears this, he will kill you...we can't do anything against powerful people. When an organisation comes, it gives help to the maliks and elders."

The *malik* was reported to travel with armed escorts—a mixture of people in police uniforms and personal guards—but his sharecroppers were also considered part of his security, informing him of any strangers in the village. One informant commented:

> If we don't inform him, then one day he will find out and then he won't leave us alone...he is a very smart person because he searches for farmers who don't have any income, are very weak and can't do other work. He searches for a person who will always accept what he says.

Thus while there is some sense of physical security in the village, for many it is largely dependent on association with the *malik*. There is no school within the village, a fact which some attributed to a lack of interest in education on the part of the *malik*. Life can be uncertain for those who are economically dependent on him, as they can easily

lose their sharecropped land. For those households who have established independent income sources through non-farm work, a degree of economic independence is possible.

In Julan there is also a strong hierarchy, structured around six maliks. There is a "head" malik for the whole village (whose father was a malik before him), an assistant to this malik, and four sub-maliks, each of whom has part of the village under his jurisdiction. The behaviour of the head malik is seen by many as entirely self-interested, and even his relatives gave accounts of how he used his power to take land and other resources from them.[64] The shura is comprised of these six maliks and four other villagers, but the decision-making and power lie with the maliks, as informants made clear.[65] The maliks are also well connected to provincial and central political structures, which have provided employment for their relatives as bodyguards for key political figures in Kabul. One of the maliks described his authority:

> As a malik in this village, I make the solutions and agreements for people...my rate is not specific and differs according to the problem. Once a daughter of the head of a government department had failed in a board examination and her father came to me to pass his daughter. I, that girl and her father went to the board and told them to enrol that girl in the Medical Faculty and they did.

For both villages only a minority of men over 18 in the study households are literate—about 3 percent in Lalakai and 16 percent in Julan. For males of school-going age, 56 percent from the case study households in Lalakai are in school, and only 21 percent from the households in Julan. Of the 79 females over five years in the study households, only one, an older woman, is literate.

In summary, both villages are resource rich, with large inequalities in land ownership. Both have strong social hierarchies, and the largely self-interested behaviour of the elite has meant the

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63 Interview with the *malik*, January 2009. This statement flatly contradicted the statement of one official from the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, who claimed that "*maliks* and commanders have no role" (Pain, "Evidence from Kandahar," 11).

64 Pain, "Evidence from Kandahar."

65 Pain, "Evidence from Kandahar."

provision of public goods in these villages is limited. These are, in a sense, private village republics, run largely by and for the benefit of the social elite. These are autocratic regimes in which the village base is a resource for the social elite to leverage greater power in relation to economic self-interest, and to gain strong connections to provincial and national politics. There is no evidence of any developmental interests or elite interest in the good of the wider population. Without the economic opportunities that Kandahar offers, the majority of the village households would lead a life entirely dependent on the landed elite.

The Badakhshan villages

The villages of Badakhshan contrast strongly with those of Kandahar, although there is greater variability between the Badakhshan villages than those of Kandahar. The largest village, Shur Qul, is located three hours from the district centre of Jurm in a narrow plain on the Kokcha River. Although it has the largest land area (see Table 3) of the three Badakhshan villages, historically it has had a grain deficit, and male labourers have seasonally migrated to work in the irrigated plains of neighbouring provinces. Livestock has met the remaining village needs. Inequalities in land-holdings are modest, with the largest landowner owing 20 *jeribs* of irrigated land, while most households own five *jeribs* or less.

The village used to be at the end of the road. Given its proximity to the lapis lazuli mines in the neighbouring district, it was the place where government officials in the 1950s used to stop on their supervisory visits to the mines. They stayed with the *arbab* (village leader) and, according to various informants, this opened his eyes to the significance of education for employment.[66] With contacts and awareness, the *arbab* lobbied for the construction of a school in the village, and by 1978 some 90 percent of the district high school graduates came from this village. By 1978, several cohorts of students had graduated from university and were in government employment, building wider contacts that would be of value in the future.

Distance from Jurm—where government and Soviet forces were based after 1978—limited direct conflict, although various bombing raids were carried out. With the ending of the *arbab* system, the village was reported to have selected a commander (a process that contrasts with other villages, where commanders were self-appointed or imposed) to lead the village and handle external relations with the competing mujahiddin parties that had emerged.[67] He appears to have been skilful in protecting the interests of the village. There were schisms and conflict within the village, and these fracture lines still exist between those aligned with Jamiat and those supporting the Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's more radical Hizb-i Islami. The commander, a former schoolteacher, supported the continuation of education, and several of the village's graduates returned and taught in the schools, paid by a levy raised within the village.

With the establishment of Rabbani's administration in Badakhshan in the early 1990s, the village maintained its relative independence, but made use of its connections with a key Massoud commander established by one village graduate and at agricultural college. As a result, the village was able to negotiate access to the lapis lazuli mines for one month per year, a source of income that ensured the survival of households during the years of drought (1998–2001). In the mid-1990s a girls' school was started with support from Norwegian Church Aid, despite the opposition of some mullahs in the village.

Since 2001, the educated elite of the village have played a key role in engaging the attention of NGOs and expanding the village's educational facilities, drawing on teachers within the village for both boys and girls. The first generation of female students are about to graduate from Grade 12. Funds have been secured for road improvement, the provision of safe water and the construction of a clinic. In addition, in combination with a grant obtained from an NGO, it has been possible to construct a micro-hydro scheme under the NSP, providing electricity to the village and employment for a

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66   Pain, "Evidence from Badakhshan."

67   Pain, "Evidence from Badakhshan."

Table 3: Summary of Badakhshan village characteristics

Village	Altitude (m)	Number of families	Households per family	Irrigated land (jeribs)	Rain-fed land (jeribs)	Irrigated (as percentage of total)
Shur Qul	1,925	302	1.1	800	1,200	40
Toghloq	1,232	178	1.5	234	66	78
Khilar	1,976	44	1.2	50	200	20

Source: AKF village databases

significant number of villagers. The village has struggled economically since the decline of the opium economy, and also lost access to the mines after they were taken over by Zalmay Khan's brother. Opium poppy brought benefits, but the crop was never cultivated on the same scale as in Toghloq, and since its decline out-migration to other provinces and Iran has increased. The poorer households have been rationing consumption due to a rise in grain prices in 2008.

Toghloq is located in a cluster of five villages in a wide-well irrigated lateral valley at lower altitude. It has the least arable land of the three study villages but the highest proportion of irrigated land. In the past, it had a self-sufficient grain economy and extensive land-holdings, but with a minority of households owning the majority of the land. Many of the landless households sharecrop land in neighbouring villages. It is the most resource rich of the three villages with respect to land, water resources and access to markets. Although a school was established in the valley in the 1960s, few graduates were reported to have moved on to university and government employment. After 1978, the valley appears to have quickly joined the opposition and was a site of intense resistance to government, although without clear leadership due to competing parties on the left and right. The mujahiddin destroyed the school and killed teachers in the valley, thus bringing to a halt all education until after 2001.

Although there was considerable armed conflict and destruction in the valley, the agrarian economy survived. However, following the Soviet departure in 1989, the valley came under the control of a powerful regional commander, allowing various valley commanders to compete for position. While collective action was effective in defending the village from the outside world during the Soviet period, it is less evident that the power of commanders within the village could be controlled in the period that followed.[68]

Because of more reliable water sources, the village was less affected by drought than others and moved early into opium poppy cultivation, bringing unprecedented prosperity and the ability to purchase cars, televisions and other luxury goods. After 2001 the major commanders left the valley and moved to Kabul. Nevertheless, when there was an attempt to bring in an opium eradication team in 2005, there was armed opposition that seized the team's vehicle—an action that would have been unlikely in the other two villages. With the decline of opium production from 2006 onward the village economy suffered. For households with sufficient land resources, it meant a return to a pre-war economy of self-sufficiency. For those without land, it meant a decline in demand for off-farm labour, leading to significant out-migration. Relying on the connections of the former commanders in Kabul, villagers often found employment in the army and police.[69]

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68   There are accounts of power-holders attempting to take wives by force. See Pain, "Evidence from Badakhshan," 43.

69   The distinction is made between on-farm labour (working on one's own farm), off-farm labour (working on another's farm or shepherding, for example), and non-farm labour (working outside agriculture and livestock management).

The third village, Khilar, is the smallest of the three, and the households are closely related to each other. Its location is the most marginal of the Badakhshan villages, on a small plateau near the Khustack valley, which is a side valley off the main river. In 2007 road access was finally obtained. A significant portion of village lands were reported to have been sold a long time ago by the local religious leader, and there are more recent records of land being sold during the drought years to the Khustacki people in the valley below. During the drought, the village lost livestock and mortgaged and sold land; consequently many households were in considerable debt by 2001, and have become even more dependent on sharecropping and wage labour. About one-third of the village's irrigated land is reportedly owned by people from outside. During the war, much of the pastureland was taken by one of the Khustacki commanders, and the village has not been able to recover this land.

Before the war, villagers had limited access to education. There was a school in the valley, but only a few men from the village managed to graduate and attend university. Even before the war, the village had a grain deficit, and a majority of households had members who migrated seasonally to Kunduz and Takhar. Relations with the valley people appear to have been cordial, with cross-marriages taking place with the valley Sunni. During the first phase of the war (1978-92), the village had a perilous existence, due to its religious minority status, and was subject to considerable discrimination and hostility. There are memories of physical violence used against the village, with labour and food being commandeered. However, the village remained largely outside the conflict between the government and the mujahiddin. After 1992, conflict in the Khustak valley and between the Khustak valley and villages in Jurm valley escalated. The position of Khilar became increasingly perilous until a commander emerged who was better able to defend the village. He achieved security in part through organisation and direct military action against a particularly predatory valley commander, who was later killed in a separate conflict. However he also sought alignment of the village under the protection of a more sympathetic commander based in the valley, who was more protective of them due to his Ismaili parentage.

Since 2001, the fractured and conflictual relations between the Khustak valley and Jurm have continued, and the village has maintained dependent relations with the Khustack valley commander, whose authority exceeds that of the village council. The village experienced relative prosperity during the years of opium cultivation, but largely through off-farm employment opportunities in the main valley rather than its own cultivation. Since the decrease in opium cultivation, the village economy has suffered a severe decline; the very dry year of 2008 was particularly difficult, due to the village's dependence on rain-fed lands. Several households severely reduced their livestock-holdings in order to survive. As a consequence, there has been migration to Iran, but little recruitment into the army or police. This is partially because a son of one of the village leaders died in the army. More children are now attending school in the valley, but the distance prevents many girls from continuing beyond Grade 8.

During the presidential election in 2009, when President Karzai secured a disputed second term, his representatives (through the presence of Zalmay Khan), along with those of his chief opponent Abdullah Abdullah, came to Badakhshan and visited the districts in which the three study villages are located. In the case of Khilar, the village leaders and local power-holders were taken to campaign on behalf of Zalmay Khan in neighbouring valleys, and particularly among the Ismaili community. Toghloq largely ignored the election and had little to do with either candidate. Shur Qul—the most prominent village in the district, with strong links to Zalmay Khan—was first approached by Abdullah Abdullah's campaign, which asked to set up an election office there. The request was declined, following discussion in the CDC, on the grounds that it might contribute to conflict after the election. Zalmay Khan's campaign made the same request to the village, but it was also declined. The willingness and ability of the leadership of Shur Qul to maintain relative

independence and manage external relations is characteristic of many other actions the village has taken in the past. The behaviour of the other two villages with respect to the election was also in keeping with their past patterns of behaviour.

Badakhshan village comparison

There are important points of similarity among the Badakhshan villages. All of the villages and households benefitted from the opium economy during the period of 2000-06. These were years of relative prosperity, with high levels of food security for most if not all households. The years since then have seen a decline in rural employment and wage rates, poor rainfall, and a significant rise in grain price during 2007-08—challenging economic conditions, made even more so in the context of an unstable political environment. Compared to 2002-03, there has been an overall economic decline for a majority of households, despite a period of relative prosperity during the opium years. Many of the poorer households have been rationing food consumption since 2006, with a decline in both the quantity and quality of food consumed. Even in an average year only a quarter of the 24 households in the three villages meet more than six months of their annual household grain requirements from their own farm production. Nine households (nearly 40 percent) obtain less than one-third of their grain supplies from their own farm production. A majority therefore have to secure more than 50 percent of their grain supplies from other sources. These villages remain subsistence economies and, with limited opportunities within the village, the need for income diversification is acute.

However, it is the contrasts between villages and their structural dimensions—pre-existing social structures and the behaviour of the village elites—that are most critical to analysis of context. It has been argued that the three villages differ significantly in these respects, and that these differences have implications for household economic trajectories. In the case of Shur Qul, its marginal agro-ecological position has limited its agricultural potential, and it has long had a grain deficit. Over 60 years ago, the village elites put the village on an educational track, which has yielded dividends both intentional

and unintentional. While they are unlikely to have predicted the circumstances of 1980-2001, the commitment of educated villagers and the wider connections they built ensured that the village maintained its educational investment during the war years, and provided physical and economic security for its inhabitants. Whether or not this built on or contributed to the strengthening of a moral economy in the village, it is clearly the case that the village has had a developmental and welfare agenda, and the benefits have not been restricted to the elite. The building of a school, roads and a health clinic, and the provision of drinking water have all provided general benefits, and the poor have continued to receive support. The commitment to education from all households, even those struggling to achieve food security, is not in doubt and has the potential to provide longer-term dividends; for those who were educated earlier, the benefits are already clear. and the public works programme has provided some additional employment. Yet while the provision of public goods has reduced some elements of structural poverty, it has not, and cannot, address food and economic security in the immediate or near term—limited land availability and altitude set limits on significant production increases.

In contrast, Toghloq has had the strongest agricultural economy of the three villages, but there has been a significant landed elite. Possibly because of the elite, there is little evidence of engagement with the outside world prior to 1978. Aided by its defensible location, the village response after 1978 was to organise successful armed protection against the outer world. After the departure of the Soviets, self-interested behaviour by village power-holders appears to have increased, perhaps reflecting the greater wealth inequalities of this village, in contrast with the other two. In consequence, physical security within the village has not been assured; there have been cases, for example, of powerful people taking wives through forced marriage.[70]

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70 Adam Pain, "'Give a Wife to a Widower and a Dog to a Divorced Man': Evidence on Conjugality from Badakhshan," (paper submitted for publication).

The village leadership does not appear to have shown the degree of social concern for the village found in Shur Qul, and there has been limited action to secure other public goods since 2001. While the rebellion of the village against the communist government may well have had wide support within the village, this did not correspond with internal physical security, and abuse of power seems to have been common both before and after 2001. The extraordinary wealth generated

The key point is that all three villages have survived, although they have achieved survival through different means and with contrasting outcomes, as well as with distinctly different social orders. All have internal divisions that should not be underplayed, but to varying degrees they all show a persistence of customary institutions—both hierarchical (village elites) and consensual (for example, the role of village elders in dispute-resolution, and the custom, particularly in Shur

Table 4: Household literacy rates and school attendance by age and sex for Badakhshan villages

Village	Shur Qul	Toghloq	Khilar
Literate male head	4	1	2
Literate female head	0	0	0
Males 18 or older	19	24	25
Percentage of literate males age 18 or older	47%	17%	24%
Females 18 or older	16	23	15
Percentage of literate females age 18 or older	12.5%	8.7%	7%
Males age 5-17	17	14	11
Percentage of males age 5-17 in school	94 %	71%	100%
Females age 5-17	13	11	9
Percentage of females age 5-17 in school	100%	73%	78%

by the opium economy after 2001, while clearly benefiting everyone, disproportionately benefited those with resources of land or labour. The provision of public goods is less than in Shur Qul, although opportunities for agriculturally based employment are greater here than in the other two villages.

Khilar, a small and politically marginal village with limited resources, appears to have limited social differences as well. The village has achieved protectorate status, thus gaining physical security through external means, but its marginal agrarian economy has long meant a dependence on labour opportunities in the district rural economy. There has been a long-term decline in its livestock resources. Public good provision is probably lowest in this village, a circumstance which is in part a factor of location, but also of size and social identity.

Qul, of earning position through reputation). Educational outcomes provide the greatest evidence of action for the village good and its consequences. These outcomes are best among household respondents in Shur Qul (see Table 4); this is true for both men and women, although the differences between female and male literacy rates should not be ignored. These outcomes contrast with the educational outcomes of the sample households for the Kandahar villages.

In summary, the effects of long-term education are evident in Shur Qul. Although this has led to employment of educated people within the village by an NGO, it is unlikely to be replicable across many villages. However, the social action of the village leadership in Shur Qul has, by attracting funding for infrastructure projects (from the NSP, the Aga Khan Foundation and other sources),

created significant opportunities for non-farm wage labour that have been limited in the other two villages.

The Sar-i-Pul villages

The three Sar-i-Pul villages are all located in Sayyad District, south of the provincial centre, and lie within 30 kilometres of Sar-i-Pul town on the Sarchashma River. Upstream villages along this seasonal river have been taking more than their customary allocation of water, and a long-running dispute over water distribution remains unresolved.[71] Although located at a lower altitude than the Badakhshan villages, they are equally if not more economically marginal, due to a combination of limited irrigated and marginal rain-fed land and less reliable rainfall. Although opium was cultivated in the district, it never reached the extent of cultivation in Badakhshan, and the period since 2001 has been one of steady

The most distant village from Sar-i-Pul is Kushlak, and it is also the poorest, with limited land inequalities and very little irrigated land. The wealth and position of the richest man, who is also the head of the *shura* and a sub-commander to more powerful figures two kilometres away in Pishin, has arisen largely through his external connections. Indeed, Kushlak sees itself as somewhat overshadowed by and dependent on its neighbouring village, especially since certain key public goods—education and health care—are only available in Pishin. There is a feeling in the village that it has been treated unfairly with respect to aid and public goods distribution. However, it is also the case that the village has remained isolated and conservative in its attitudes, due to a lack of exposure to the outside world through migration, and a village leadership with limited experience outside of the village. The village's NSP-funded generator remains unused due to lack of funds for fuel, and village elders have not encouraged girls' education.

Table 5: Household land ownership in Sar-i-Pul villages

Village	Kushlak	Pishin	Sarband
Altitude (m)	1,000	900	600
Number of households	180	1,200	1,100
Household wealth group	**Household land ownership: rain-fed vs. irrigated land (jeribs)**		
I	20/2	100/15	35/6
I	40/4	-/2	-/-
II	25/-	-/-	20/8
II	25/-	25/6	10/-
II	-/-	12/8	30/-
II	-/-	25/1	-/-
III	-/-	20/-	-/-
III	-/-	8/2	-/-
III	-/-	2/4	-/-

economic decline and increasing out-migration in search of non-farm work. All of the villages have grain deficits, although to different degrees. Village-level data is not available, but Table 5 presents the land data for the study households.

Pishin is the district centre and therefore contains many public services, including the ulluswal (district governor), the district police station, a girls' and boys' school, a veterinary clinic and a health clinic. It is also somewhat better resourced than Kushlak—more households have irrigated land, but there are not great inequalities in land ownership. Due to conflict, many of the households, in contrast to those of Kushlak, spent nearly a decade as refugees

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71 Adam Pain, "Understanding Village Institutions" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2004).

in Pakistan. This appears to have contributed to or reinforced a sense of collective identity, and since their return the village has been successful at attracting public goods. These include an NSP-funded electrical supply, a community-managed generator and communal water pumps. The village also successfully campaigned for the construction of a girls' school, built using community labour on land donated by a wealthy resident. The contacts established during the villagers' time as refugees have consolidated to establish regular patterns of seasonal migration back to the Pakistan brick fields where many had worked before, contributing to the household economy. Reportedly a significant number of households (estimates range from 300–500) have migrated back to Pakistan to live.

As with Shur Qul in Badakhshan, two key people seem to have played a critical role in supporting the welfare and the provision of public goods in the village. Both were among the first to have gone to high school 30 years ago in Sar-i-Pul town; one is now the local doctor, and the other is a village schoolteacher. The former played a critical role in the village migration to Pakistan, and the latter's father was an important religious figure during the refugee experience. Both currently have prominent positions in the village.

The third village, Sarband, is located some five kilometres from Sar-i-Pul town. It is comprised of two ethnic groups, each with its own *shura*—a majority Arab population, and a minority Pashtun population that was relocated from Farah in 1920. Much of the land belongs to landowners living in Sar-i-Pul town. This has resulted in a high incidence of landlessness, in contrast with the other two villages, and therefore greater land inequalities. The degree of landlessness and proximity to Sar-i-Pul town mean many households rely on off- and non-farm labour. There is significant seasonal migration to Kunduz and Baghlan, and the cities of Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif and Shibirghan. The two CDC *shuras* are ethnically based, but the Pashtun *shura* has been disbanded because the funds were taken by the leader, who disappeared, and the Arab *shura* was reported to be used primarily for the benefit of the treasurer.[72]

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72 Shaw, "Evidence from Sar-i-Pul," 18.

Despite the ethnically based divisions within the NSP CDC, there is a history of the two social groups in the village being mutually protective of each other during the mujahiddin and Taliban periods, when each in turn were potential targets for violence. However, there was considerable displacement of the population, both to Iran and Pakistan, during the conflicts.

Sar-i-Pul village comparison

None of the three Sar-i-Pul villages has had the kind of relative autonomy—whether through village leadership or village resources—seen in the Badakhshan villages of Shur Qul or Toghloq. Pishin—which is the district centre and has the best agricultural resources and an educated elite—comes closest to Shur Qul in terms of the capacity and interest of village leadership to seek and gain the provision of public goods. In that sense, there are developmental dimensions to the village. The relatively small size of Kushlak, its poorer resource base, and a political position dependent on the more powerful Pishin have kept it subservient and limited its autonomy. It is closest to Khilar in terms of its status, although the ethnic minority status of the villagers from Khilar has ensured an internal cohesiveness in the village that is less evident in Kushlak. The village of Sarband is peri-urban and ethnically mixed. While displaying certain aspects of community, including mutual protection during the conflict, it has other dimensions that work against a strong village identity—notably the high degree of landlessness, due to absentee landlords living in Sar-i-Pul town, and a high degree of migration. It is perhaps significant that both NSP CDCs have largely proven failures.

If one compares the educational outcomes for the study households (although data was not available for all of them), Pishin clearly has produced the best results. For the five households with educational data, all girls aged five to 17 were in school, as were 85 percent of boys in the same age group. In contrast, for the eight households in Kushlak, only 8 percent of girls and 13 percent of boys were in school. For the seven households in Sarband for which data was available, 33 percent of girls and 61 percent of boys were in school.

There were accounts from all three of the Sar-i-Pul villages of customary structures—particularly the important role of village elders in dispute-resolution—but these were subject to the influence of the village elite. Significantly, there was no evidence in reports from any of the villages of strong connections outside the district or province, although there was one case of a land dispute being taken directly to Kabul for resolution, avoiding district and provincial government structures.

In all three Sar-i-Pul villages, however, the marginal agrarian economy, the destructive effects of war (which displaced the population to a much wider extent than in Badakhshan), and the proximity to the provincial centre have all perpetuated the villages' peripheral position in relation to the plain economy of Balkh.

The Faryab villages

The three Faryab study villages are located in Dawlatabad District, about one hour from Maymana on the new district road. The centre of the district is a plain, largely consisting of irrigated land that is watered from channels connected to a river running through the centre of the district. Surrounding the plain are low-lying loess hills, which are used for rain-fed agriculture and livestock grazing. The three study villages are all located within three to ten kilometres of each other on the irrigated plain surrounding the district centre. Chakar lies to the east, Hisaar to the south and Efroz due north of the district centre. Efroz is located at the bottom end of the irrigation system. Each of the villages has a distinct ethnic identity, and Efroz was reportedly settled by formerly Kuchi people some 100 years ago.

Dawlatabad, with its agrarian structure and irrigated economy, is more similar to Kandahar than to Badakhshan and Sar-i-Pul. There is a high degree of inequality in ownership of irrigated land; the small number of landowners, particularly in Hisaar (see Table 6) tend to be surplus producers, and a majority of households own limited or no land, or small areas of rain-fed land that have

largely failed during the past decade.[73] Efroz was reported to have the highest ratio of rain-fed land to irrigated land of the three villages. In Faryab, unlike the other three provinces, ethnic identity has played a significant role in determining village behaviour over the past two decades. Ethnic divisions that had been latent were exacerbated during the mujahiddin period and Taliban rule.

The economy of the district has traditionally been based on agricultural produce and associated industries (sheep, karakul skins and leather, wool and carpets), with the Turkmen village Chakar having a long history in the production of fine carpets. However, since the long drought from 1998-2002, and despite some good agricultural years since then, there has been a long-term decline in the role of agriculture in the economy. Drought has partly driven this change, but it is also related to the breakdown of traditional rules about water distribution between upstream and downstream districts within the province. Notably, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, under the rule of Rasul Pahlawan, the district immediately upstream of Dawlatabad converted land that had been rain-fed into irrigated land, extracting more water from the river than had traditionally been the district's quota. This practice continues, leading to acute water shortages in the two downstream districts of Dawlatabad and Andkhoy. That said, during the Taliban period, the inhabitants of Efroz dammed the river, causing downstream water shortages, and used lift pumps to extend their irrigated land into previously rain-fed areas. This practice has also continued in the post-2001 period.

The effects of water shortage and the extent of landlessness have led to increasing levels of seasonal and long-term migration to Iran in search of work. A respondent from Efroz commented that there is a "little Efroz" in Iran, illustrating the long-term economic dependence on outside employment and its importance to the village economy. It is likely in the future that with the

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73   It was not possible to collect data for individual or village-level land ownership or household education; the data used here has been collated from secondary sources.

*Table 6: Summary of Faryab village characteristics**

Village	Chakar			Hisaar			Efroz		
Ethnicity	Turkmen			Uzbek, Turkmen and Pashtun			Pashtun		
Irrigated area (jeribs)	2,500			2,000			1,250		
Number of households	422			700			410		
Households by wealth group	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III
	25	85	312	20-30	140-150	525	n/a	n/a	n/a
Average land ownership by wealth group: irrigated vs. rain-fed (jeribs)	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III
	15-25/ 60-100	5-6/ 10-20	0.5/ 8-10	40-50/ 100+	2-3/ >20	0/ 0.5	n/a	n/a	n/a

*Data drawn from secondary source. See Adam Pain, "Rural Recovery and Rehabilitation Programme for Faryab Province: Final Evaluation," A Report to Christian Aid (Herat, Afghanistan: Christian Aid 2007). Note that the household numbers differ from those reported in Nezami with Kantor, "Evidence from Faryab," 14-18, and were obtained from NSP records.

cultivation of the rain-fed lands, there will only sufficient farm employment to keep labour in the district during good years. In contrast with the other three provincial settings, there appears to have been a limited amount of opium cultivation in the district.

Chakar, in particular, has a longer history of education, resulting in an educated elite that was schooled in the district centre before 1978. This is not the case for Efroz. Both Chakar and Hisaar have had new schools built or are in the process of construction, and at the time of this research Chakar was constructing a girls' school, combining the resources of the village's two NSP *shuras*. In contrast, Efroz does not support the education of girls due to social norms. Respondents referenced a boys' school that has long been shared with a neighbouring village, but there are problems of access. Because the school is located on the other side of a river without a proper bridge, boys cannot get to school during winter and spring when the river is in full flow.

However, what emerges most strongly from the Faryab villages is not so much the ability of villages to manage their internal affairs and provide public goods, but more the need for villages to provide their own security against a hostile and shifting external world over the past 30 years. In this sense, they can be seen as highly defensive village republics, with external threats providing

considerable incentives to ensure internal collaboration within the village. There is a long, shifting and turbulent history to this insecurity, but since 2007 matters have gotten notably worse.

Although ethnic divisions have a long and meaningful history, the relative robustness of the agrarian economy until the late 1970s reduced their potential to cause conflict. However, with the conflict between mujahiddin parties, the scene was set for the rise of ruthless warlords—notably Rasul Pahlawan, who was particularly prejudiced against Pashtuns and caused many of them to migrate.[74] Efroz lost rain-fed land, livestock and pasture access to Pahlawan. There was direct conflict between the two commanders of Chakar and Efroz. Chakar and Hisaar kept their security through heavy payments of tax and supplies of food and personnel for Pahlawan's militia. After 1992, conflict between him and General Dostum, and between the Jamiat-led government in Kabul and Dostum's Junbesh, created even greater instability, which lasted until the Taliban took control of Faryab in 1998. Non-Pashtun respondents viewed the pro-Pashtun Taliban in part as a response to Rasul Pahlawan's behaviour under the previous regime. Many inhabitants of Chakar and Hisaar migrated to Pakistan during this period. However, with the fall of the Taliban, peace was made between Chakar and Efroz through the actions of

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74   Nezami with Kantor, "Evidence from Faryab," 10.

the elders in the two villages, demonstrating their role in conflict reduction and peace-building. As one informant from Chakar commented:

> *Our elders said that these people have treated us badly. If we do the same to them, then how are we different? After the Taliban we did took no revenge on anyone, even those who escaped and came back to the village later.*[75]

In the post-2001 period, the province has slowly slipped into a state of increasing insecurity, particularly since 2007. This has had growing economic impact, reducing the ability of people to move outside the villages to access their rain-fed lands and pasture in the hills, as well as their ability to move freely in the district. Since 2001, the instability has been driven in part by continuing conflict between Junbesh and Jamiat, and by attempts on the part of the central government to weaken the power of Junbesh and provincial power-holders through the appointment, from Kabul, of local governors. It has also partially been due to internal divisions within Junbesh, with a reformist wing distancing itself from the military wing. This has led to a rise of local commanders, whose funding from Junbesh has dried up and who have increasingly sought local forms of revenue through coercion. Auraz Zabet, a key commander from Chakar with a poor reputation, was forced into exile in 2004 and returned in 2009, but was assassinated in 2010. The politicisation of the provincial governor position and increasing levels of corruption have been mirrored in the process through which district governors have been appointed and removed.

Since 2007, there have been increasing incursions of armed men from outside the district, creating a greater sense of fear. As one informant commented:

> *Before the Taliban and during their rule, people knew their enemies, but now in this government people do not know their enemies. They don't even know whether these terrorists are Taliban or the government. We used to know where the enemy came from, who they were and what they were doing, but now it is very difficult to confirm who is our enemy and who is our friend.*

Until the recent assassination of Zabet, Chakar was able to maintain security inside the village and ensure a defensive position because of the commander's armed militia. There have been armed clashes with groups outside Hisaar and Efroz. Efroz has also become vulnerable because, as Pashtuns, they are suspected by some of being linked with the Taliban and are blamed for the increasing insecurity. In addition, elders from the other villages felt that government meetings with the elders of Efroz were inappropriate, since, in their view, the insecurity in the region has no ethnic roots; the elders from the other villages felt they were in a better position to reduce inter-village conflict.

The government's decision to allow the arming of Commander Zabet and his militia to provide security in the district, particularly during the presidential election, was not supported by Chakar or the residents of the other villages, not least because of Zabet's record of past abuses of power.[76] It was also felt that the militia was unable to provide the needed security outside of Chakar. As a result, the other villages reported paying taxes to the insurgent groups in order to ensure their security. Many saw the government and district officials as unreliable and incapable of providing security, leading to the increasing need for villages to provide it themselves. Hisaar, for example, began providing guards to protect its school from being destroyed at night.

In summary, the Faryab villages are facing increasing levels of insecurity and are caught between the corruption and failure of government, on one side, and the ruthlessness of the insurgents on the other. In the current unstable environment, villages have been left to provide their own security. They have been successful to some extent—for example, the ability to provide security through military means in Chakar—but it has become increasingly necessary to negotiate with insurgents and pay taxes in order to protect themselves.

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75 Nezami with Kantor, "Evidence from Faryab," 22.

76 Each of the 36 villages in the district was required to provide two guns to the militia.

3.5 Conclusion: Comparing villages

At a minimum, the evidence points to the existence of 11 very different villages, each with distinctive characteristics. Some of these characteristics are clearly foundational in terms of resources and location, but patterns of outcomes (or derivative factors) correspond with these foundational characteristics. There is an indication, however, that there might be a link between village resource endowments, their distribution and the social order of the village. Thus villages that have a high proportion of irrigated land (as in Lalakai, Julan, Toghloq and Hisaar) tend to have greater land inequalities, lower educational outcomes and poorer public good provision. In contrast, where resources are poor and land inequalities are smaller, public good provision may be greater (although this is not necessarily the case). The exemplar is Shur Qul in Badakhshan, but for other villages additional factors come into play. Where villages are relatively small (as in Khilar and Kushlak), are comprised of an ethnic minority (as in Khilar and Efroz), or both (as in Khilar), then there may be limits to what can be achieved. Specific social norms related to ethnic identity (for example, the education of girls in Pashtun villages) may also influence practice. Thus it is important to note that each village has a distinctive social order, and the summary characteristics presented in Table 7 indicate some of the potential determinants and outcomes of village behaviour. The characterisation of the village republic is used solely for the purposes of discussion here, and not as an approach to follow. It is not a judgement on the village and does not imply that these features are unchangeable.

However, the context in which each village is located is also significant. In part, this is a matter of the wider regional context or social order, and is discussed further below. But where villages are tied by resource-sharing—notably irrigation water, as can be seen in both the Sar-i-Pul and Faryab villages—then village behaviour in relation to other villages also becomes significant.

It is also evident that different social orders generate different levels of public good provision.

The most fundamental public good is security against the outside world, and this is achieved through a variety of means. At its most basic, this is through a warrior approach, as in Toghloq, where security is assured through location and military means. Chakar, mainly due to circumstance rather than inclination, has achieved security through an armed commander and militia. This may however be more a characteristic of the individual than the village, and the commander's death may lead to new vulnerability for the village. More often, external security is achieved through powerful external connections, as in the Kandahar villages, or through dependence on a more powerful neighbouring village, as in Khilar and Kushlak. Again, Shur Qul stands out as having managed—by virtue of its remote location, size and strategic management—to establish diverse external connections to protect itself against the hostile outer world.

External security, however, does not necessarily lead to security within the village, as the histories of Chakar and Toghloq demonstrate. The Chakar commander had a poor record within his village, and in Toghloq there were accounts of powerful villagers taking wives by force. In addition, where external security was gained through powerful connections with the external world, as in Lalakai, village security was seen entirely in terms of protecting the social hierarchy and was not necessarily afforded to villagers outside the elite. Thus it is the behaviour of the social elite, rather than collective action, that seems critical to the provision of public goods within the village.

There are also limits to the security that a village can provide, and success largely depends on the levels of external threats of violence. It is notable that households in all of the villages in Kandahar, Faryab and Sar-i-Pul underwent periods of migration out of the country in order to escape violence during the 1980s and 1990s. Only the physically isolated Badakhshan villages were able to avoid the necessity for migration to any large extent.

Beyond basic security, other possible public goods include dispute-resolution, safe drinking water, health care and educational facilities. While most

Table 7: Relative strength of key determinants of study villages' behaviour

Village	Land inequalities	Ratio of irrigated to rain-fed land	Education	Village public goods	Characterisation of village republic
Kandahar					
Lalakai	+++++	++++		+	Autocratic
Julan	++++	++++		+	Autocratic
Badakhshan					
Shur Qul	+	+	+++	++++	Developmental
Toghloq	+++	++	+	+	Warrior
Khilar	+	+	+	+	Dependent
Sar-i-Pul					
Kushlak	+	+	+	+	Dependent
Pishin	+	+	++	++	Weak
Sarband	++	+	+	+	Dependent
Faryab					
Chakar	++	+++	++	++	Defensive
Hisaar	+++	+++	+	++	Defensive
Efroz	+++*	++		+	Defensive

*Land owned by absentee landlords

villages could provide dispute-resolution (although with variable outcomes, as will be discussed in the next section), the capacity to support more "developmental" public goods was less certain, reflecting the degree of social inequalities in the village.

What comes across strongly in all cases is that village republics survive and prosper according to their ability to build patronage relationships with the district and political elites. Thus villages should not be seen as autonomous or self-sufficient, but rather as nodes in a wider network of connections, on which they depend to varying degrees and in different ways. Where there has been some sort of political settlement, as in Badakhshan or Kandahar, a degree of security is afforded (although in all cases it would be difficult to argue that such settlements are secure). Where such a settlement is lacking and power shifts are common, as in Faryab, then survival is much more difficult, regardless of how internally strong a village might be. And where a village's location is marginal to political interests, as in Sar-i-Pul, there are limits to the extent to which external patronage networks can be built. Thus higher-scale social orders are fundamental to the shaping and survival of the village social order. It is clear that the old regional patterns that Barfield identifies, along with contrasts between mountain and plain locations, are still relevant to the present.

The following section discusses the extent to which these village social orders matter to the present engagement of development agencies in rural Afghanistan, as well as the ways in which such agencies might build a better understanding of village contexts.

4. Taking Account of Village Preconditions

4.1 Introduction

Based on the evidence presented in the previous section, this section argues that the study villages show significant differences in key properties and have distinctive local social orders. These are based in part on the resources the villages command, how these resources are distributed within the village and the extent to which villages deliver public goods. There is, of course, no systematic characterisation of Afghan villages in this way, but it is argued based on field experience that these properties and their variability are not unique to the study villages and may characterise many Afghan villages.

For example, Box 1 summarises a set of observations regarding variability of villages in Badakhshan.[77] Similar observations on variability of villages in Chaghcharan District in Ghor draw attention to contrasts between villages based on landscape position, resources and their distribution and social resources.[78] Much of the work on understanding the spread and diffusion of opium has emphasised the significance of understanding differences between villages, districts and landscapes.[79] Work on informal credit has drawn attention to the differences between study villages in social structure, land distribution and informal credit practices.[80] There

is, therefore, a strong case to be made that differences between villages are widespread.

There is also widespread evidence on the capacities of villages to undertake dispute-resolution and deliver other public goods through customary structures.[81] Thus there is a strong case for recognising the existence of village self-governance through customary and informal means.

This is not a judgement on how well or on what scale villages can deliver public goods, or the extent to which the delivery is "democratic" or just. However, it will be argued below that evidence suggests village structures can often command legitimacy, although the Kandahar case studies clearly point to the fact that this is not always the case. Nor is it a statement that this is a feature of all villages, or present in all villages to the same degree. Village behaviour seems to be determined as much by external circumstances as it is by internal circumstances.

Given the evidence of village variability and the existence of village customary structures and capacities to deliver public goods, might there be a connection between village resources and public goods delivery? The evidence from the 11 villages points to ways in which their resource endowments and distribution might be linked to social orders, but this requires further discussion and will be explored in Section 4.3 of this paper. If, as will be argued, a connection can be made between village characteristics and public good provision, then this strengthens the need to better understand contexts in relation to programme design, implementation and evaluation.

First, however, the following section will return to and develop the arguments about why village preconditions matter to programme design.

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77 Adam Pain, "The Impact of Opium Poppy Economy on Household Livelihoods: Evidence from the Wakhan Corridor and Khustak Valley, Badakhshan," report to the Aga Khan Foundation and GTZ (Kabul, Aga Khan Foundation, 2004), 40-41.

78 Adam Pain, "A Strategic Review of AfghanAid's Livelihood Programme in Ghor Province, Afghanistan," report to AfghanAid (Kabul: Afghan Aid, 2006).

79 David Mansfield and Adam Pain, "Evidence from the Field: Understanding Changing Levels of Opium Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2007).

80 Floortje Klijn, "Informal Credit Practices in Rural Afghanistan, Case Study 1: Herat" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2006); Floortje Klijn, "Informal Credit Practices in Rural Afghanistan, Case Study 2: Kapisa" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2006); Floortje Klijn, "Informal Credit Practices in Rural Afghanistan, Case Study 3: Ghor" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2007).

81 Deborah J. Smith, "Community-Based Dispute Resolution Processes in Nangarhar Province" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2009); Jennifer Brick, "The Political Economy of Customary Village Organisations in Rural Afghanistan," http://www.bu.edu/aias/brick.pdf, September 2008 (accessed 15 August 2010).

Box 1. Differentiating Villages in Badakhshan: The Roles of Geography and History

It is important that attention be paid to contexts of place and the need for programming to respond to it. At the provincial level there are geographies of place, which set land areas, transport corridors and livelihood opportunities. Although Badakhshan is a mountainous economy, the meaning of this varies among districts and valleys within districts, all of which are characterised by different patterns of labour migration and flows.

It is also necessary to note finer scales of differentiation. Within the Khustak valley, the uppermost village of Arjangan—located at high altitude along trade corridors to both Zebak and Wardooj-e Bala—has had a long involvement in opium production, which contrasts with villages lower down in the valley. Within the Wakhan corridor, the altitude increases as one moves east, as does the relative importance of livestock. This differentiation extends right down to the level of individual village location. For example, some villages are built on the outwash of mountain streams from the Wakhan Mountains, enjoying access to alluvial soils and plains that neighbouring settlements lack.

However, geography does not provide a complete explanation. History also matters, although not in a deterministic way. Patterns of trade, for example, and other economic linkages are an outcome of both location and history. The origins of opium consumption among the Ismaili communities of Shighnan, Wakhan and elsewhere clearly relate to historic trade with China, social structures, economic interests and relative isolation. In part, the continued prevalence of addiction among these communities has fed off this historical legacy, combined with relative isolation after trade routes were lost with the closing of borders and their economies became peripheral.

Some villages have also historically had grain deficits and have exported labour or livestock, while others have not, resulting in different levels of engagement with the outside world. Sometimes stark differences can be seen between two villages that are close together and in a similar agro-ecological position. The villages of Shafchan and Sina lie within a few kilometres of each other, but their economies and relative wealth could not be more different (although 25 years ago they were very similar).

For Shafchan, the turning point seems to have come during the early 1990s, when trading relations and informal contacts with the mujahiddin were capitalised by a few individuals, giving them both access to credit and the opportunity to negotiate for the right to work the lapis lazuli mines near Lajawardshoy. Resulting benefits for the village took the form of work opportunities, and during the drought the village had substantial assets that allowed it both to weather the downturn in agriculture and lend to others who were not so fortunate. Consequently, the village was well positioned to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the opium economy. Sina, on the other hand, was riven with political rivalries that continued until very recently, leading to major asset destruction and theft. The effect was deepened during the drought, and now a considerable amount of land is in the hands of people from Shafchan and Jurm. Conflict remains beneath the surface today.

All of this points to the necessity for extreme caution in generalising about livelihoods in different locations, and the need to fine tune programming based on context.

4.2   Do village preconditions matter?

The discussion here primarily focuses on programmatic interventions that seek to induce more competitive practices in the institutional sphere through promoting democratic processes. The arguments made, however, apply to the economic sphere as well. The key question to consider is whether village preconditions matter. At one level, this question is answered directly and pragmatically by considering the extent to which programme effects are determined by existing conditions in villages. However, this paper also questions the basic goal of many programmatic interventions, which is to transform local social orders into a Western model in which impersonal relations drive competition in markets and politics. Thus, at this second level, the issue of village preconditions is examined in terms of how realistic this transformational objective actually is given the logic that drives the existing social order.

Field evidence indicates that in many cases programmes take little account of what already exists due to a lack of time, awareness or interest.[82] While there is recognition of pre-existing informal practices, such as with informal credit and village customary structures, these are most often seen as obstacles to be replaced or removed by formal practices and institutions.[83] Recently, however, greater attention has been paid to informal justice practices playing a greater role in the legal system.[84]

The evidence on whether or not village preconditions matter in terms of programmatic outcomes is limited; it is most often found in specific case studies or anecdotal comments, rather than in systematic investigations. In part, this is because programmatic practice has demonstrated little interest in the subject. An NSP evaluation recognises that preconditions exist, but only in connection with their potential to reduce NSP impact. In the design of the NSP randomised impact evaluation, the following comment takes note of the issue of preconditions:

> *Given the wide economic, ethnic and cultural diversity in Afghanistan and the relative complexity of the economic and political changes that the NSP potentially induces, it is expected that significant variation in impacts will be observed and that these will be correlated with variation in pre-existing conditions such as ethnic diversity, income inequality, and the quality of pre-existing local governance structures.*[85]

The analysis then goes on to explore the potential interactions between these pre-existing conditions and NSP impact, but from a perspective that not only reduces these interactions to mathematical equations based on proxy indicators about which there might be some debate, but also that looks at them as effects that will reduce programme or NSP impact.[86] Thus, rather than seeing preconditions as something to engage with from the beginning, they are seen as obstacles to programme success.

However, existing evidence including that contributed by Section 3 indicates that the nature of existing village social orders does affect outcomes, as shown by the comparison of the NSP programme introduction in the Kandahar villages and Shur Qul in Badakhshan. This is also consistent with the comparative evidence that new institutional practices very rarely displace what is already present, but instead not only overlay them, but

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82   Pain, "Impact of Opium Poppy"; Pain, "Strategic Review."

83   On the subject of informal credit, see Karri A. Goeldner, 2004. "Roles and Opportunities for Rural Credit Initiatives in Afghanistan's Opium Economy," http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTAFGHANISTAN/Resources/AFRFW_2_Rural_Credit_Initiatives.htm, 8 December 2004 (accessed 15 August, 2010).

84   See for example Deborah J. Smith and Jay Lamey, "A Holistic Justice System for Afghanistan" (Kabul, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2009).

85   Andrew Beath, Fontini Christia and Ruben Enikolopov, "Randomised Impact Evaluation of Afghanistan's National Solidarity Programme (NSP) Hypothesis and Methodology," 15, http://www.nsp-ie.org/reports/HM.pdf, 23 April 2008 (accessed 10 December 2010).

86   There is an even greater debate about the validity of randomised evaluations. See Angus S. Deaton, "Instruments of Development: Randomization in the Tropics, And the Search for the Elusive Keys to Economic Development," (Cambridge, MA, USA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2009).

also become subject to them.[87] This phenomenon is called institutional "bricolage," a term that describes what happens when new institutions are transplanted over pre-existing ones. The new practices that emerge as a result are a combination of the old and the new.

Thus, when viewing rural labour relations from a perspective that sees markets as complex institutions, it is often assumed that liberalisation and market penetration through promoting competition will reduce the extent to which such labour relations are based on custom and non-market obligations, such as patron-client relations. Liberalisation is assumed to reduce the ways in which markets are segmented by structures of gender, ethnicity, age and place. The evidence suggest otherwise, however, and as one source comments with respect to India:

> Scholars watching the interplay between the economy and institutions such as caste and gender expect that, with liberalisation, the significance of the social factors which structure economic behaviour will diminish relative to that of economic factors...[but]... ethnographic evidence from the local urban economy...shows that far from diminishing, social institutions are being refashioned by market exchange, becoming more economic in their content and roles, but still shaping economic action in ways which are quite distinctive to these institutions.[88]

A comparable conclusion has been drawn with respect to the failure of externally-driven policy in state reconstruction processes to displace existing structures. The result is a muddle of overlapping institutions where "there are different sets of rules of the game, often coexisting in the same territory...[and] interventions of the international community simply add a new layer of rules, without overriding the others."[89] Research on provincial-level appointments in Afghanistan found that new bureaucratic rules for appointment are simply layered over old ones and become subject to the older rules of the game.[90] While donors have sought to address what they see as the problem of a lack of merit-based selection procedures in order to promote a rules-based administration, this competes with the existing relationship-based governance model. The outcome has been a formal process that follows the rules of merit-based appointments, while informally there has been heavy influence to ensure certain appointments. As one commentator states:

> Political power is not exercised in a progressively depersonalised, formalised and rationalised way through agreed "rules." Rather it continues to be exercised in a personal and patronage-based manner, but within the overall framework of bureaucratic rules.[91]

Thus it cannot be assumed that customary practices and village behaviour will simply be displaced or transformed by new structures. The evidence on how the NSP *shuras* in the two Kandahar villages were captured by the village elite shows this very clearly, and the preliminary evidence from the NSP's own evaluation bears this out.[92] Rather, there is the distinct possibility that new practices which programmes are intent on introducing simply become subject to pre-existing structures. Where programmatic success is claimed—for example, the successful formation of CDCs—this may due more to preconditions than anything introduced by the programme. Thus the formation of the NSP *shura* in Shur Qul, seen to be one of the success stories for its implementing partner, could mainly be due to the preconditions of a village actively seeking

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87 Ben Jones, *Beyond the State*.

88 Harris-White and Jankarajan, *Rural India*, 158.

89 Jonathan di John, "Conceptualising the Causes and Consequences of Failed States: A Critical Review of the Literature," Working Paper No. 25, London School of Economics Crisis States Research Centre (London: London School of Economics, 2008).

90 Martine van Bijlert, "Between Discipline and Discretion: Policies Surrounding Senior Subnational Appointments" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2009).

91 Sarah Lister, "Understanding State-Building and Local Governance in Afghanistan" Working Paper No. 14, London School of Economics Crisis States Research Centre (London: London School of Economics, 2007), 6.

92 Andrew Beath, Fontini Christia, Ruben Enikolopov and Shahim Ahmad Kabuli, "Estimates of Interim Program Impact from First Follow-Up Survey," http://www.nsp-ie.org/reports/BCEK-Interim_Estimates_of_Program_Impact_2010_07_25.pdf, 27 July 2010 (Accessed 10 December 2010).

to expand public good provision. In contrast, while the CDC in Khilar has been formally established and an NSP project implemented, the key decision-maker for the village remains a power-holder who lives outside of the village.[93] All of these observations raise questions about the extent to which transformation of existing social orders is possible through outside interventions, when such interventions are captured, co-opted or ignored by the elites.

Village preconditions are therefore likely to matter in terms of influencing how programmes engage with a village and influencing the effects that programmes achieve. Consequently, more attention must be paid to these preconditions and their variability, and analysis of these preconditions should become a systematic part of programme design and evaluation. Additionally, if recognition is given to these patterns of village behaviour and evidence of village social orders, new opportunities may arise for building on them rather than simply seeking to supplant them.

4.3 Customary structures and public goods

The evidence provided in Section 3 suggests that resource endowments, their distribution and village customary institutions should be recognised as interrelated dimensions of village structures rather than seperate entities. Thus the Kandahar villages are characterised by a high proportion of irrigated land, high inequalities in land ownership, marked gendered inequalities, deeply hierarchical social structures and limited public good provision. In contrast, the Badakhshan villages—particularly Shur Qul, with its limited irrigated area, low land inequalities, grain deficit economy and flatter social hierarchy—have significant public good provision. This suggests not only the possibility of a correlation between these variables, but also potentially an element of causality. This observation is consistent with Barfield's descriptions of the deep historical contrasts between the mountains and plains.

Jennifer Brick's recent study of customary structures in Afghan villages provides additional evidence that is consistent with the findings detailed here.[94] It discusses not only the reasons why such village orders have proved to be so durable, but also the possible connection between village characteristics and customary institutional behaviour.

The study focuses on the role of three key customary organisations—*shuras*, *maliks* or *arbabs*, and the mullahs (village clergy and lawgivers) It examines the effects these structures have on public good provision, investigating in particular the resolution of land disputes, general dispute-resolution, and local safety and security.[95]

In summary, it argues that village customary organisations can often exhibit four key features that are supportive of the provision of public goods: the separation of powers among the key community structures, the existence of checks and balances between these structures, the presence of economic veto players who have sufficient influence to ensure that there is no abuse of power, and the ability of these organisations to raise local revenue under conditions of budget constraints.

With respect to the separation of powers, the study argues that the *maliks*, *shuras* and mullahs have customarily had decision-making authority over distinct spheres of activity. This has resulted in a clear separation of powers and thus limited the concentration of power in a single individual. Their powers are separate because the different leaders' right to govern is drawn from separate sources of authority or legitimacy. Thus the *malik* has historically drawn authority from both government and the village inhabitants, obtaining the right to represent the village on their behalf. The mullah's authority is based on religion and the right to speak

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93 Pain, "Evidence from Badakhshan," 22-23.

94 Brick, "Political Economy."

95 It drew its evidence from a study of six provinces, 16 districts and 32 villages with analysis of secondary sources on village customary institutions. Fieldwork provided the basis of the qualitative analysis; Central Statistics Organization, "National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2005" (Kabul: Central Statistics Organization, 2005) and The Asia Foundation, "Afghanistan in 2007: A Survey of the Afghan People" (Washington, DC: The Asia Foundation, 2007) were the sources for quantitative data.

on matters determined by Sharia law. The village *shura* has traditionally drawn its authority from acceptance by the village households, based on earning it through reputation and performance. The evidence from the 11 villages reported in this paper is consistent with this proposition, and there are many accounts of households going to the different authorities according to their specific purposes.

The second key determinant of public good provision by customary organisations is that there should be checks and balances that prevent abuse of authority. This, it is suggested, will increase the incentives of local leaders to provide public goods. Such constraints can operate either by one organisation exerting constraint on another or through individuals having the ability to constrain the actions of a customary organisation. Again the evidence found in the village case studies is supportive of this conclusion. Even in the Kandahar villages, where this proposition might be put to the strongest test, it was found that there are some limits to and constraints on the behaviour of the village elite.

One head of household, a *malik* in Julan, bought land in the village only to find that a sharecropper also had land deeds that were dated earlier than his. The dispute between the two men went to the district court, which ruled that the sharecropper's deeds validated his claim. The *malik* had to accept this decision, but in front of the court warned " that this sharecropper won't cultivate this land," a threat that has so far proven effective.[96] Additionally, the head *malik* in the village threatened to divorce his wife and disinherit her sons, but the village elders told him, "It is not according to your wish that you can disinherit the sons," and that *Sharia* law applied.[97]

There were also accounts from Badakhshan of *arbabs* being removed and new ones being selected by villages, demonstrating that they are subject to the village's approval. One of the household heads in Toghloq remembered how his father, who had

been a poor man, was selected to be the village *arbab* because of his reputation and was prevented from migrating out of the village.[98] The commander in Shur Qul was also selected by the village in the early 1980s.

However, it is also clear that the strength of customary checks and balances can be highly variable. The checks and balances in some of the Badakhshan villages, particularly Shur Qul, were much stronger than those in the Kandahar villages. While there were some religious or legal constraints on elite behaviour in the latter, in many spheres of activity the behaviour of the *maliks* was not constrained. For many of the other villages the extent of such checks and balances was somewhere in the middle.

The explanation for these differences probably lies in Brick's third proposition—that a village needs a sufficient number of actors who have the ability to constrain potential abuses of power through customary organisations, and that the agreement of these actors is necessary for a change in the status quo. In Afghan villages, the key customary power-holders or elites have traditionally been the landowners, although in many places commanders took over this position in times of conflict. Thus, where land is more evenly distributed, power is more likely to be dispersed and there is likely to be a sufficient number of people capable of preventing abuse of power.

Where land ownership is highly concentrated, as in the Kandahar villages, and this land generates considerable wealth, an individual or small group of individuals becomes the veto player. External interventions can often reinforce the power of these individuals. Under such circumstances, as has been seen, there is limited capacity to constrain the behaviour of these elites because they are independent of the interests of others and have no interest in widening access to public goods. Where economic power is combined with a customary position, as in the case of the *maliks* of Kandahar, there are limits to preventing the abuse of power, and public good provision is likely to be limited where such individuals are self-interested.

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96   Pain, "Evidence from Badakhshan," 34.

97   Pain, "Evidence from Badakhshan," 54.

98   Pain, "Evidence from Badakhshan," 31.

The relationship between inequality and social solidarity is the key point. According to Putnam, "Inequality and social solidarity are deeply incompatible."[99] Where land inequalities are low and even the elites are economically insecure, the elites have a shared interest in promoting and supporting social solidarity and the provision of public goods, and in ensuring wider access to them. Where land inequalities are high and where elites are economically secure, they have fewer incentives beyond social sanctions to widen access to public goods. Where they can evade social sanctions, as in the Kandahar villages, they have no incentives to promote social solidarity.

The fourth precondition for public good provision through customary structures is the ability to raise revenue. It is argued that such conditions exist through payment of cash or kind, and that revenue payments are made from within villages to each of the customary authorities. Again there is some evidence of this from the village case studies, although it is not systematic. Shur Qul provides the best examples, including a village levy to pay for schoolteachers during the war period. There were also numerous accounts in the same village of small payments made to the mullahs for various services, including religious instruction.

In summary, there is a wider body of evidence that not only supports the existence of local social orders, but provides insights into their underlying factors. This research also details the conditions under which social solidarity and public good provision might be maximised through customary institutions. The following section draws on this evidence to outline an approach to building more systematic analysis of villages and their social orders.

Neither this evidence nor the arguments supporting the significance of village social orders presented above make the claim that these are democratic structures providing open access where all can compete. The claim is made, however, that these structures have not only proved durable, but in many circumstances command legitimacy. Better

understanding of them, as well as how and why they vary, is therefore fundamental to programme design. This subject is considered further in the conclusion of this section.

4.4 Building and applying an understanding of key village preconditions

This section draws together the evidence from the village case studies and wider evidence to propose a framework that might capture key dimensions of local social orders and the underlying determinants of the variability between villages.

In the study on long-term village change in India, various ways of classifying and grouping villages are explored.[100] These are partly based on underlying causal elements (location, resources in relation to population, and the nature of the production process—for example, irrigated versus rain-fed agriculture). However, outcomes (or derivative factors) linked to demographic trends, farming practices, and aspects of labour relations and wages are also examined. Using factor analysis to explore variables (individual and grouped) that might underlie inter-village variability, four key factors are identified as relevant to explaining this variability: the proportion of irrigated and dry-land agriculture and the development of non-farm employment; social or economic "backwardness" as linked to variables such as female literacy, male literacy and incomes of non-farming families; gender and caste sensitivity, for the purpose of capturing the more difficult variations in village social and institutional arrangements;[101] and the distribution of the means of production, primarily land.

These factors account for a significant proportion of the variation in outcomes among village economies, and are used to group villages into clusters of similarity and difference. While the research that is the basis of this paper did not generate the data to

99   R. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 254.

100   Harriss-White and Jankarajan, *Rural India*.

101   Caste is not a social category that is used in Afghanistan, but socially ascribed identities such as ethnicity are.

allow such an analysis of the case villages, the Indian study nevertheless identifies some of the key factors likely to be of interest in understanding variability and characterising context.

The mapping of key characteristics of the study villages in Table 2—notably resource richness and land inequalities—draws in part on the indicators used in the India study. Section 4.3 of this paper proposed a link between the degree of land equalities and likely elite behaviour regarding the provision of village public goods. In addition, there is evidence from the case study villages that ethnic identity—in relation to both the outer world and the inner world of the village—can also be a significant factor in influencing if and how security is obtained.

Key indicators for village preconditions

This section describes key indicators and discusses ways in which this understanding might be applied. Table 8 outlines a list of key measures that can potentially provide a minimal understanding of village preconditions. They are divided into factors that define the position of a village in relation to the outer world, and those that are internal to the village. For each an indicator is proposed, with a brief narrative account of how that indicator might be interpreted.

A. Position of the village in relation to the outside world

Five indicators are proposed that give some measure of where a village fits, physically and socially, in relation to its immediate surroundings.

- **Altitude** (metres above sea level): The higher a village's altitude, the more likely it is to be remote and subsistence-based.

- **Distance**: This is essentially an indicator of remoteness and travel time (specified according to the means of travel) from the district centre. Greater physical remoteness, particularly when combined with higher altitude, is likely to result in subsistence economies. Villages that are closer to large urban economies (Herat, Mazar-i-

Sharif, Kabul, Jalalabad and Kandahar) are more likely to have significant non-farm economies.

- **Landscape position**: The location of villages—whether they are located on irrigated plains, valley floors or lateral mountain valleys—is significant as a resource and remoteness indicator.

- **Resource position**: Many Afghan villages share resources, particularly water, with other villages and are dependent on resource-sharing mechanisms. Upstream villages are potentially in a better resource position than those located mid- or downstream under conditions of water scarcity.

- **Social identity**: Social identity (ethnicity) in relation to surrounding villages determines the need for a village to behave defensively. Where there are mixed social identities in a given location, the potential for insecurity is greater, particularly when this is combined with downstream resource positions or shared grazing resources.

B. Aspects internal to the village

Seven basic indicators of internal village conditions are proposed.

- **Resource endowment**: This is a measure of the ratio of irrigated land to rain-fed land. Where the ratio is high (i.e. there is a high proportion of irrigated land), there is stronger potential for surplus generation and an agriculturally rich economy. Such conditions are also likely to produce a landed elite.

- **Land distribution**: This is a measure of equality/inequality within the village. Where inequalities are high and there are good resource endowments, it is more likely that a village elite will run the village for self-interest, and public good provision may be minimal or captured by the elite. If there is a high proportion of landless households, agrarian-based livelihoods are likely to be limited or precarious.

- **Social identity**: The presence of different social identities within a village may indicate potential inequalities or conflicts or patterns of exclusion.

Table 8: Key Indicators of village preconditions

Measure	Indicator	Use/Relevance
(a) Position of village in relation to outer world		
Altitude	Metres above sea level	Remoteness/resources
Landscape position	Plain, main valley floor, lateral valley, valley edge, hillside or hilltop	Resource base position
Water resource position	Up-/mid-/downstream, irrigation or valley	Resource access
Distance	Distance (hours of travel) to district centre/provincial city by specified travel means	Relative measure of remoteness/access to non-farm income; dependent on size of urban economy
Social identity	Ethnic composition	Ethnic identity in relation to surrounding villages
(a) Internal to village		
Resource endowment	Proportion of irrigated to rain-fed land	Relative indicator of richness of village resource base
Land distribution	Degree of inequality (land-holdings of largest landowner); number/proportion of landowners with similar holdings as proportion of total landholdings; percent of landless households	Linked to issues of power and customary structures; where high, lowest levels of village public good provision likely
Social identity	If more than one social group, proportions of each	Internally, potential sources of divided loyalties
Customary structures	Presence, role and practices of customary structures	Assessment of their presence, performance and contribution to public good provision
Village economy	Grain surplus/deficit; degree of labour migration/proportion of households with one member migrating	Livelihood base
Start date of boys' education	First date of boys going to school in village/neighbourhood; availability of schooling between 1978-2001	Evidence of early access to education/ presence of educated men in village
Start date of girls' education	First date of girls going to school in village/neighbourhood; proportion of girls in school	Proxy indicator for attitudes toward women

- **Customary structures**: This provides a characterisation of the presence, role and performance of customary structures and the village elite.

- **Village economy**: This is an assessment of the extent to which the village as a whole has, on average across the years, a grain surplus or a grain deficit economy, and therefore whether it is a subsistence or a surplus economy. This can be linked to an assessment of the importance of non-farm income sources and degree of migration.

- **Start date of boys' education**: Taking education as a key indicator of wider public good provision, the start date of boys accessing education and the presence of educated members of households in the village are suggested as proxy indicators for expansion of public good provision within the village.

- Start date of girls' education: This is a proxy indicator for attitudes toward women. Earlier start dates indicate a more permissive attitude and wider provision of public goods. It could also be combined with assessments of the proportion of girls in schools.

Using the indicators

At a minimum, use of these indicators provides a simple characterisation of the village social order, and the degree of variability that exists

between villages likely to be included in a programme. Grouping villages according to similar characteristics may allow qualitative comparisons of programme outcomes and impacts, according to the clustering of villages.

However, this is not sufficient. Villages should be clustered according to similarities or dissimilarities, and programmes designed, implemented and monitored according to the specific preconditions of each cluster. Thus where village economies are subsistence based, where there are limited land inequalities and where social identities are relatively homogenous, one might expect that customary structures work well, social solidarities are strong and public good provision is maximised (although these outcomes should not be assumed). These are favourable preconditions for programmes seeking to engage with existing structures, rather than attempting to superimpose new ones. However, one should be careful not to assume that these conditions will necessarily lead successful programme outcomes.

In the case of villages like Shur Qul—where strong social solidarities exist and the village leadership are committed to public good provision—there are therefore opportunities to secure existing informal rights and perhaps formalise them to benefit the poorer members of the community. Programming may seek to build on existing social protection measures, and increasing public good supply is likely to enhance existing conditions.

In the case of villages like Khilar, however, the fundamental and political problem of village dependence on external power and patronage must be addressed first. Simply providing more resources is insufficient under such circumstances.

For villages such as those in Sar-i-Pul, a different approach is needed. Given the resource poverty of these villages and the limited capabilities of the village elites to mobilise greater levels of social solidarity and action, a gradual or step-by-step approach to building village public goods and community action is needed—applying standard programmes will not work.

At the other extreme—where villages are characterised by a rich resource base, a surplus-generating economy and large land inequalities—customary structures are likely to provide minimal public goods, and programme interventions have a high probability of being captured by the elites for their own interests. This can happen directly, as in the Kandahar villages,[102] or more subtly when the elites simply work behind the scenes to ensure that new structures serve their interests. Little is likely to change in villages where deep structural poverty and inequalities exist unless these problems can be addressed directly—a task which few programmes or NGOs currently undertake. The same problem arises when there are deep inequalities between villages, caused either by ethnic identity or resource position in relation to irrigation.[103] New strategies of engagement must be developed to find ways of working in such contexts. Rather than assuming the elite can be marginalised, which is likely to generate hostility if not outright opposition, a strategy that seeks to create incentives for the elite to open up access is more likely to provide sustainable outcomes.[104]

Thus, in the Kandahar villages and also in Toghloq, programming as usual will be almost guaranteed to ensure resource capture by the elite. Seeking to work around the elite, while potentially feasible, is more likely to create vulnerabilities for the poor.[105] Engaging with the elite and seeking to provide incentives for them to concede a degree

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102   There was an example in Julan of a *malik* coercing an educated woman to give up her position running an education programme for girls, supported by an NGO, so that the illiterate wife of the *malik* could take over the salaried position.

103   For more on the irrigation structures of Balkh, see Adam Pain, "The Spread of Opium Poppy in Balkh" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2006).

104   This comment draws on the observation that elites are only likely to concede their privileges when they believe it is in their interest to do so, found in Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

105   There is an account of a programme seeking to build the rights of a group of sharecroppers in a Ghazni village; when they started to organise, the main landlord kicked them out of the village (Personal communication with Kerry Jane Wilson, Programme Manager, Danish Agency for Coordination of Afghan Refugees, 2003).

of control over the village is the best way to proceed, but this approach takes time and must be accomplished gradually. The extent to which it is possible will also depend on the wider social order, and conditions in Kandahar are particularly difficult.

For the Faryab villages, where basic external security does not exist and cannot be achieved by the villages on their own, the provision of security is a precondition for engagement in the villages, although humanitarian interventions may be appropriate.

In assessing programme impact, the need to incorporate knowledge of village preconditions becomes even more acute because programme interventions provide opportunities for villages to work with additional resources, perhaps revealing how the villages truly function. However, the difficulties of performing impact assessments that address these dimensions are considerable. Few NGOs or national-level programmes have the resources, support or incentives to go further than reporting on programme deliverables; as a result, assumptions are made about programme impacts and what causes them.

The NSP randomised impact evaluation indicates one route of evaluation, setting up a systematic approach to evaluation of programme effects in its randomised design.[106] However, the theory driving the NSP evaluation—which deals with the role played by externally imposed institutional change—is open to debate and is challenged by the evidence presented here. Additionally, the randomisation approach, while procedurally sound, is nevertheless unmindful of the deep structural variations in village preconditions that have been reported here, and is likely to miss the variability which is, from a programming point of view, a highly important factor to understand in determining cause-effect relations. The approach suggested here can potentially complement and deepen the analysis of the randomised evaluation. As Brick notes, however, it is difficult to divorce the resource effects—the provision of funding—

in the NSP programme from the effects of the institutional implants themselves.[107]

Certainly a more systematic quantitative investigation of village preconditions requires a data-heavy approach, complex and weighty sampling structures, and statistical analyses that are likely to be beyond the reach of most organisations. There is room for detailed qualitative case studies to explore in more depth the cause-effect relations between village preconditions and programme impact at a level that quantitative approaches cannot begin to address, but these studies also have resource costs of data, time and expertise. However, there are other qualitative approaches—using techniques such as significant change analysis and participatory monitoring, which would involve field staff and village households in assessing programme effects and changes—that need not be so resource intensive.

4.5   Conclusion

This section has argued that village preconditions must be taken into account more systematically in programme design, and has suggested an outline framework through which this might be accomplished. It has also noted that even if new institutional structures are moderately successful, they very rarely achieve the expected effects. They often end up subject to pre-existing social arrangements, rather than displacing them. This leads back to the concern raised at the beginning of the section: How realistic is it to expect that new institutions will lead to the transformation of existing social orders, given their deep history and their durability? Do the new institutional arrangements address and supplant the logic and incentives under which the existing social orders work?

The evidence suggests that transformation will not come easily or quickly, and there are few incentives, particularly for the elite, to shift the ways in which access to political and economic resources is regulated. Gains in welfare are likely to remain subject to informal relations. It is no accident that all of the villages described in this study, to varying

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106   Beath et al., *Randomised Impact Evaluation*.

107   Brick, "Political Economy," 25-26.

degrees, achieved their status as republics based on the quality of the external relationships that they have built with regional political elites. Interventions that seek to transform village social orders, when villages already dependent on wider social orders which operate based on different incentives, are thus unlikely to have much lasting effect. While markets are not bound by village identities, it is also unlikely, given elite control, that access to them will come to be governed by free competitive conditions, instead of informal social connections.

Thus, rather than seeking to bring about change through an externally imposed institutional model (as the NSP evaluation correctly labels it), recognition must be given to the significance of village preconditions and local social orders. Programmes should seek to work and build on these rather than attempting to ignore or displace them. This means that in cases where village elites limit household access to resources, they must be provided with incentives to the point that they feel it is in their interests to allow more equitable access.

5. Conclusion and Implications

Since 2001, the state-building exercise has mainly been driven by a practice of seeking to transplant Western institutional arrangements—notably democracy, the market and the rule of law—into Afghanistan. The underlying assumption has been that by creating an open environment of political and economic competition governed by the rule of law and impersonal relations, the benefits the West has gained from these institutional arrangements would quickly filter through to Afghanistan as well. This model has largely assumed that what had come before was irrelevant or unimportant, or that it would be swept away in the reconstruction effort. This has not been the case, and the process of institutional transformation has made, at best, faltering progress.

This transformation process has failed, in large part, because Afghanistan is not adrift in complete disorder, as has been assumed, but operates based on its own logic. What governs political and economic relations in Afghanistan is not open competition, but deeply personalised relationships. Under this system, access to the rents of economic and political resources is highly restricted by regional political elites, who maintain an uneasy truce among themselves, and by the central government, which in turn is governed by patronage. Running through all of these factors to varying degrees are fundamental Islamic values linked to moral obligations.

This paper has argued that regional identities and social orders have deep historical roots, which have proved highly durable and remain relevant to understanding Afghanistan's political landscape. Barfield's four regions—Herat, Kandahar, Balkh and Kabul—persist. Furthermore, within and across these regions there are durable contrasts between the relatively non-hierarchical subsistence social orders of the mountains and the more hierarchical social arrangements of the surplus-generating irrigated plains. The strongest political elites have emerged in those regions where economic rents have been greatest—Balkh,

Herat, Kandahar and Nangarhar, which are all border regions where the opium economy has made a significant contribution to the economy. In addition, Badakhshan, by virtue of politics, opium and its borderland location, has risen from a past of economic and political marginality to be a significant player. Balkh, Herat and Badakhshan have reached a degree of political stability, while Kandahar remains mired in insurgency. Areas that offer little to major political players in terms of political or economic resources players have either sunk into a relative obscurity—Sar-i-Pul, for example—or remain the subject of increasing contention between parties, as with Faryab, where neither Kabul nor regional centres such as Balkh are in control.

Within these regional identities can be found the equally distinctive village social orders, which have been the focus of this paper on the grounds that most rural people live in villages. These village social orders are highly variable and, as this paper argued, have displayed different capacities to produce and access public goods through customary structures.

The determinants of this variability are linked to some of the indicators of regional identity, notably resource richness and the relative equality of resource distribution within the village. Among the study villages, the most successful have performed strongly in the delivery of public goods and can be termed "developmental" in their outlook. Such villages appear to have had educated elites at an earlier stage of their history, in comparison with other villages. At worst, villages are run as personal estates for the benefit of landed elites. In between are small or socially marginal villages, which exist through security dependent on more powerful neighbours. There are also warrior villages that have been successful to various degrees in providing security against external threats, but not necessarily in affording security within the village. Significantly, all villages depend to varying degrees on patronage

relationships with regional elites for their security, welfare and economic prosperity.

In addition to the national-level reconstruction effort, much programmatic intervention in villages has consisted of either public good provision—schools, roads, water and sanitation—or institutional transplants related to democracy and the market, all of which can be subject to elite capture. Evaluations of programme impact rarely go beyond the use of indicators to prove programme success and justify the theory of change implicit in programme design. The evidence suggests, however, that transplanted institutional arrangement are more likely to become subject to existing arrangements than to be independent of them.

This paper has argued that understanding these contextual factors—regional and local social orders—should be treated as fundamental to programme design, and it has proposed a simple framework to address village social orders more systematically. Several recommendations arise from this.

5.1   Recommendations

Address regional and provincial funding imbalances.

There are a number of provinces that have offered little in terms of political or economic resources to key regional elites, and therefore have been neglected both by them and the central government. Notably, neither of the two study provinces that fall into this category—Sar-i-Pul and Faryab—have been significant opium producers. Additionally, they have not been politically significant to donors, who have also neglected them. Sar-i-Pul has suffered severe economic hardship, and little has changed over the last decade; if anything, matters are worse. In the case of Faryab, the central government appears to have abdicated any responsibility for security. In both provinces, security threats that were not present before are now on the rise.

A more strategic approach to investment by donors would fund provinces more equitably, perhaps based on population. At present, areas where there is the greatest insecurity receive the most resources.108 Arguably, putting more resources and public good investment into areas that have been marginal can have the benefit of keeping them secure rather than allowing them, through deepening poverty or government neglect, to slip into increasing insecurity. Greater provision of public goods and employment would yield significant dividends, and might also strengthen the capacity of villages to self-manage.

Recognise village preconditions.

Development actors working at the field level need to take more account of village variability in programme design, implementation and evaluation. A simple framework for village characterisation, which can be further developed, has been proposed in Section 4. At a minimum, this would lead to a more systematic shaping of programme content to village context, and a more careful evaluation of programme effects and how they vary between villages. This would include an assessment of the extent to which village preconditions may have contributed to programme impacts. It would also imply a more careful understanding of the way in which interventions, whether in the form of microcredit or new institutional arrangements, interact with what already exists, such as informal credit or customary authority structures.

For those development actors with relatively small programmes, this analysis, monitoring and evaluation is likely to remain largely qualitative, but even relatively simple qualitative studies can contribute significant understanding.

For those development actors with larger programmes—significant coverage across several provinces or at the national level—who may be able to support more data-heavy quantitative analysis, there is a case to be made for sampling frameworks that more deliberately address some

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108   Waldman, "Falling Short."

of these structural variables, in order to explore their significance with respect to programme interventions and outcomes.

Donors also have a critical responsibility to support greater attention to context in programming. In part, the insufficient attention paid to context relates to the capacities and interests of implementing agencies. Funding and programme practices, however, are key drivers of these capacities and interests. With adequate resources, donor encouragement of more context-sensitive programming allowing for more flexible implementation approaches and assessment of outcomes could make a considerable difference.

Work with village preconditions.

If the significance of village social orders is fully recognised, it will require programmatic approaches different from those that have been applied so far. It will also require recognition that the logic of village relations to the outside world and regional political elites is based on fostering and maintaining personal relationships rather than depersonalised ones. That logic is founded on the existing incentive structures, whereby political elites at both the regional and village levels maintain, to varying degrees, their position and resources by restricting access through personalised relations rather than allowing open competition. Until higher-level elites are willing to allow more open competition, village social orders have no imperative to change. Thus there are

limits to the ability of programmes to transform village social orders quickly.

This argues for a more graduated and context-specific approach to institutional change. It first requires analysis of preconditions; a more step-by-step approach to improving on them where necessary; and a willingness to work with existing structures where they function well and equitably rather than simply transplanting external arrangements.

As has been argued, "some security is better than none...forms of security that reflect local relations of dependency...are preferable to an absence of security."[109] Where village-level public good provision is maximal—the developmental villages—there are good opportunities to build on existing structures. However, in cases where villages exist in dependent or defensive relations with others—where there is a strong common interest among inhabitants in achieving basic physical security—it is the wider determinants of dependency that must be addressed first before it is possible to address more general public good provision within the village. For villages like those studied in Kandahar, where there are formidable social and economic inequalities, the margins for manoeuvre are much smaller. In such environments, this task may be a matter of focusing on areas where village elites are more amenable to improving individual household security through public good provision before then moving on to secure existing informal rights within the social order.

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109 G. Wood, "Using Security to Indicate Wellbeing," in *Wellbeing in Developing Countries: From Theory to Research*, eds. I. Gough and J. McGregor 109-132 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 125.

Appendix: Village Key

In the individual case studies that formed the basis of this paper, all study villages were referred to by alphabetical codes to ensure anonymity. These have now been changed to fictitious names (see Table A1 below) for ease of reader reference.

Table A1: Fictitious names and original codes for study villages

District	Village name (fictitious)	Original code
Kandahar		
Dand	Lalakai	KA
Dand	Julan	KB
Badakhshan		
Yamgan	Shur Qul	BA
Jurm	Toghloq	BB
Jurm	Khilar	BC
Sar-i-Pul		
Sayyad	Kushlak	SA
Sayyad	Pishin	SB
Sayyad	Sarband	SC
Faryab		
Dawlatabad	Chakar	FA
Dawlatabad	Hisaar	FB
Dawlatabad	Efroz	FC

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