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## Local Governance in Warsaj and Farkhar Districts

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# Local Governance

## In Warsaj and Farkhār Districts

Katja Mielke, Rainer Glassner, Conrad Schetter, Nasratullah Yarash

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## Note on key actors and places

Due to security reasons and the fact that we are touching sensitive themes we decided to make the names of key actors and certain places anonymous.

## Acronyms

AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
ANA	Afghan National Army
CAF	Care for Afghan Families
CDC	Community Development Council
CoP	Commander of Police
DIAG	Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups
DPM	Deputy Project Manager
DWHH/GAA	Deutsche Welthungerhilfe/German Agro Action
FPM	Friday Praying Mosque
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
IDEAS	Integrated Development, Environment and Sustainability
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
INEF	Institut für Entwicklung und Frieden/Institute for Peace and Development, University Duisburg Essen, Germany
KRBP	Kunduz River Basin Project
LG	Local Governance

MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NRM	Natural Resources Management
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
PM	Project Manager
PRA	Participatory Rapid Appraisal
SCA	Swedish Committee for Afghanistan
UNAMA	United Nations' Assistance Mission for Afghanistan
UNHCR	United Nations' High Commission for Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	US Dollar
ZEF	Zentrum für Entwicklungsforschung/Center for Development Research, Bonn University, Germany

## Glossary

ĀBĪ	irrigated
AfS	Afghanz̄, Afghan currency
AILĀQ	summer pasture shelter for herders with their families
'ALĀQADĀRĪ	old district subdivision
ĀMIR	major commander of a district
ARBĀB	village headman (official before 1978)
ARCHA	acorn tree
CHAPAN	cloak worn by all nationalities, especially common for Tajiks
CHĀRAK	sharecropping agreement
ESHĀN	alleged descendant from the lineage of the prophet's family enjoying special status
GERAU	mortgage
HĀJ	pilgrimage to Mecca
HĀMAL	first month of the year, 21 March – 20 April
HAUZA	1) police precinct in urban areas, 2) semi-administrative village cluster
HĀVĒLĪ	compound, home
HĀWĀLA	system of informally remitting money over large distances
HIZB-E ISLAMĪ	mujāhedīn faction led by Gulbuddin Hikmatyar
IJĀRA	leasehold of land
JĀMI'AT	Jami'at-e Islamī, biggest mujāhedīn faction in N-AFG, led by rabbani, mainly Tajik, included Ahmad Shah Masood and Panjshērī faction
JANGAL	forest; but often used for any land that has some plant cover, e.g. shrubs, open woodland
JERIB (JIRĒB)	common land measure, 1 ha = 5 jerib, 1 jerib = 2000 square meters

JIHAD	'holy war' of muslims against non-muslims
KUCHĪ	nomad
LALMĪ	rain-fed
MADRASA	religious school
MANTIQA	village cluster, village
MAWLAWĪ	title of religious scholar, usually acquired in religious academy
MĒRĀB	water manager
MESHĀNO JIRGA	upper house of the national assembly
MIZĀN	Afghan month, 23 September – 22 October
MUHĀFIZ-E JANGAL	forest warden
MUJĀHEDIN	self-designation of Afghan resistance fighters against the communist government and Soviet occupation (singular: mujāhed)
QĀRĪ	somebody who knows the qorān by heart or can read it
QARIA	village
QAUM/QAUMĪ	concept of belonging to ethnic group, lineage, sub-lineage, or local community
SAYĒD (SĀDĀT, SAYĒDHĀ)	alleged descendant of the prophet
SĒR	measurement unit, 1 sēr = 7 kg
SEYAK/SEBAKSH	sharecropping agreement
SHARĪ'AT	Islamic law
SHURĀ	traditional council consisting of male members
SHURĀ-YE NAZĀR	shurā-ye Nazār-e Shamālī regional military and political structure founded by Ahmad Shah Masood
TAGAU	valley
WAKĒL	representative, deputy
WOLĒSI JIRGA	parliament
WULUSWĀL	district governor
WULUSWĀLĪ	district

# 1 Preface

Given report is the outcome of a basic investigation into Natural Resources Management-related problem areas in northeastern Afghanistan in fall 2006 within the framework of the Integrated Development, Environment and Sustainability (IDEAS) project. IDEAS is a sub-project of the wider Kunduz River Basin Programme (KRBP), an EU-financed project to approach water management on a catchment-wide scale. Field research was conducted in two districts – Farkhār and Warsaj – of Takhār Province, which have been selected as target areas for upstream water catchments' protection and forest regeneration measures. The IDEAS project is implemented by Concern Worldwide and German Agro Action over the period of three years (2006-2008).

The local governance report was meant to assist the project managers to develop a better understanding of structures, logics and mechanism of local decision-making and resources governance at a very early stage of project implementation. In the absence of a baseline study analysis this first report provided a comprehensive overview of local governance structures and highlights their relevance for NRM activities. Based on preliminary findings summarized in the paper, in-depth follow-up research will be conducted in 2007 and 2008.

A full version of this paper -- incorporating specific details about actors and conflicts -- was disseminated by Concern Worldwide and German Agro Action within the KRBP-associated development community in northeastern Afghanistan. If not stated otherwise, all information given in this report is based on empirical findings, thus, an outcome from interviews and focus group discussions with villagers, administrative staff of both districts, Concern's community mobilisers and the IDEAS project manager.

## 2 Introduction

Afghanistan's rural areas have traditionally been governed in a way that assigned the state or central government a marginal role; local framework conditions have always been more influential on decision-making, representation and dispute resolution than distant government agencies and artificial institutions.

Local governance is understood in this paper as the making and enforcement of decisions which are being perceived as legitimate and are thus abided by the majority of a local community's inhabitants. Whereas local governance is most often understood as the central state's penetration of sub-national levels of government, we understand local governance as a process of how people interact, negotiate and decide upon social interactions which influence the well-being of the whole community within the local level framework.<sup>1</sup> With our local governance approach as proposed in the concept note we aim to focus on four governance arenas:

- access and control of resources
- representation
- jurisdiction
- guarantee of security.

Local governance processes are shaped by institutions which we understand as constraining rules that make outcomes predictable and achieve some kind of prospective reliability for the actors involved. Thus, the main assumption is that a variety of institutions exists that regulate social life at the local level. These rules are either officially acknowledged, codified (formal institutions) or imposed or customary, habitual and subject of case-specific interpretation (informal institutions). Of course, formal institutions can emerge out of informal customary rules, which have proven to be 'effective' or best practices. Our understanding of local governance encompasses – besides official, more visible structures – also concepts like legitimacy, people's attitudes and perceptions, and how they shape certain power structures. Institutions cannot be separately analyzed from conflicts and security and sometimes even the distinction from certain actors or groups of actors becomes difficult.

In short, the benefit of institutional analysis lies with the fact that not only individual and/or collective actors and the outcomes of their actions are being investigated, but the underlying motivations and negotiation processes which lead to certain decisions and structure actors' behavior are also taken into account. Thus, social change processes, the understanding of which is crucial for any kind of development processes – whether locally or externally-initiated – are explained by looking at negotiation processes and how actual behavior deviates from formal rules rather than just looking at outcomes and impacts. Based on such knowledge more thorough intervention strategies for development initiatives can be elaborated according to the respective local contexts.

A look at the empirical results of our first field research shows that diverse institutional arrangements are existent in local communities. The following figure gives an overview of these and shortly comments on their main characteristics:

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the fact that the notion of village is controversial for Afghanistan at a whole, we prefer to use the term 'local'. Often enough the social entity does not coincide with the territorial one. Even identifying a community by relating its members to a mosque is critical: Mosque-communities have split up in the past due to large-scale population growth, new Friday praying mosques have been established, new communities emerged. With the on-going implementation of the National Solidarity Project (NSP) villages are being the first time identified and formalized. Thus, we largely abstain from using the term 'village' but rather speak of village clusters and/or communities. Village clusters are at some places officially pooled in hauza, semi-administrative units usually denoting police precincts in urban areas.



Box 1: Preliminary overview of local governance institutions in Warsaj and Farkhār

Institution	Prevalence	Comment
Hashar	customarily everywhere	intra-community and inter-community joint labour, involving reciprocal replication in case of only one party benefiting from immediate action e.g. inter-community - financial or in-kind contribution for madrasa-building in Nahr-e Āb; - bridge building Shingān-e bāla with Nahr-e Āb; e.g. intra-community - making roofs waterproof for winter season - reaping wheat and rye - school-building construction in Shingān-e bāla
forest warden	traditionally in places with pistachio forest, now everywhere	at community level appointed by the district administration, Dept. of Agriculture has chief forest warden (muhāfiz-e jangal) and 13 guards in Farkhār, community-level forest wardens are not paid by the government but by the communities, from each household up to 1 ser wheat per guard annually
wheat keeper	Warsaj	appointed annually at hauza-level and registered with district administration, e.g. hauza-ye Rubata-Enjin-Yawand-e Sēbdara, Mulik; paid by landowners 1 ser wheat per cultivation season
road keeper	Warsaj	appointed annually at hauza-level and registered with district administration, e.g. in Mashtān, hauza-ye Rubata-Enjin-Yawand-e Sēbdara, Mulik; paid by rural dwellers of road-adjointing communities 1 ser wheat
Mērāb	according to irrigation necessity and flood potential	appointed annually and paid by community members
CDC <sup>2</sup>	clusters soon everywhere in settled communities, so far 100% in Warsaj	appointment of NSP-council members is perceived to be necessary to access funding and implement infrastructure projects, not perceived as prospective/long-lasting local governance-institution
elders' council	everywhere	traditionally in charge of decision-making and conflict resolution, either also appointed as NSP-shurā members or elders' council as consulting body of CDCs; loss of influence in some communities in favor of government institutions/district administration, especially for conflict resolution
Mullah	everywhere	newly appointed or confirmed annually, consultative role in conflict resolution on shari'at-basis

Besides hashar and elders' councils all of the above mentioned examples of institutions are clearly formalized as they are appointed or confirmed annually and often registered with the districts' administration. Less formalized institutional practices are harder to detect since people are often unaware of the customary rules that govern their daily lives. Thus, the above overview is far from being complete. However the overview shows that local communities have generated several institutional devices to regulate their communal life in ways, which – at cursory glance – is accepted by the majority of the population.

<sup>2</sup> In this report the term Community Development Council (CDC) is used synonymously with 'NSP-shurā' and 'NSP-council'. Informants usually do not use CDC, but say shurā-ye hambastagi-ye mellī (NSP-shurā).

### 3 Historical Perspectives

The districts of Farkhār and Warsaj are part of a transitory landscape climbing up from the plains of Southern Turkistan to the high mountains of Badakhshan. Remote mountain areas were traditionally governed differently than the plains which were much more vulnerable to shifting power holders and their rule. For the spaces in between we can only assume influences of the interface resulted in hybrid power constellations along the lower mountain ranges. After the establishment of a centralized Afghan state in 1880 the territory was administratively subdivided into provinces under the rule of governors. Thus in 1886 the territory of what is today Warsaj district was under the authority of the governor of Badakhshan. On the contrary, Farkhār was subjected to a local ruler who reported to his superior residing in Khānābād (Adamec 1972: 9). Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century administrative reforms changed the status of the region. Farkhār has always had the status of a district (*wuluswalī*). In the past this was characterized mainly with the existence of a state representative in charge of tax collection. Warsaj, which is more remote and truly a mountain area was assigned district status only as a result of the 1963 administrative reorganization separating the dual province Badakhshan-Qataghan the latter of which was subdivided further into the three provinces Kunduz, Baghlān and Takhār in 1970.

Today's most striking feature of the wider Farkhār river valley which includes Warsaj and Farkhār seems to be the extent of overpopulation and resulting labor migration to Iran and other parts of Afghanistan. Interestingly enough though this is not a totally new phenomenon, but was apparent as early as in the 1920s. Grötzbach's (1968: 122) research on the socio-economic conditions in the 1950s shows that population pressure in the adjacent valleys was rampant already 50 years ago. At that time the development of the Northern provinces, large-scale irrigation of agriculture and the establishment of new centers of socio-economic activities as a consequence of road and infrastructure construction functioned as an eminently suitable valve for mounting overpopulation facilitating large-scale seasonal migration to the oases of Qataghan. With growing intensification of population growth and a certain saturation of seasonal labor demand in the irrigated plains, however, other resorts for survival were necessary. Hence, according to informants people from Farkhār and Warsaj started seeking work in Iran from the beginning of the 1970s. During the time of fighting against Soviet occupation families reportedly had at least one son with the mujāhedīn, and a second or more sons working illegally in Iran. Grötzbach also mentioned a certain spread of craftsmanship in the valleys because of limited arable land and income sources. The most common craftsmen seem to have been weavers and chapān-makers, e.g. as can still be found in Khonakhā.

Large-scale labor migration to Iran has a significant impact on people's livelihoods in Farkhār and Warsaj districts and changed social relations in the past. Traditionally the Farkhār river catchment area has been characterized by social dichotomies of *wakāls*, *eshāns* and *sayēds* on the one hand and laborers on the other hand. *Wakāls* and *eshāns*, also *sayēds*, were the upper class landowning elite in the valleys while the bulk of the remaining population used to work on their lands and in their households. As a result of income generated by illegal work migration to Iran the former laborers display a class of 'new rich' today and traditional dichotomies are currently in the last phase of dissolution. The sharecroppers of *wakāls* and *eshāns* gained wealth from remittances sent home by their family members working in Iran, now they are in some cases richer than the families whose land they used to cultivate. Reportedly, this upside-down turn of social relations in rural communities has not caused conflicts; rather everybody took the chance of additional income generation in Iran, no matter what his former social status was. *Eshāns* and *sayēds* still have sharecroppers working for them, but according to informants' accounts their relationship involves the acknowledgement of mutual respect and equal status. One implication of this is that laborers are solely engaging in cultivation of land today, they are not working inside the houses of *eshāns* or *sayēds* anymore. The obvious reason for the up-keeping of sharecropping arrangements lies in the fact that there is not enough land for everybody to buy and cultivate his own. Private landownership and the market for it are quite static, though reportedly people would also buy land after working in Iran for a couple of years. In most cases this relates to land plots outside of the two districts, often in the surroundings of Tāloqān.

The relationship between *eshāns/sadat* and others seem to be very much normal. Against the background of the *sādāt's* acclaimed and conceded descent from the prophet and the respectful treatment they enjoy in relations with others this seems to be merely of symbolic value these days without any material advantages. *Sādāt* still tend to marry only among themselves. *Eshāns* are also traditionally respected persons with some religious affiliation, today these families seem to be the most educated and well to-do, often occupying many of the few prestigious positions available in both districts, e.g. as NGO-employees, community mobilisers etc. Some communities are said to be populated exclusively by *sādāt*, e.g. Pir-e Farkhār and Dar-e Havelī. In the latter case they have a joint NSP-project (though separate *shurā*) with a neighboring non-*sayēd* community which can be taken as proof that there exist no tensions and that joint labor in relation to projects seems to be normal these days.

A traditional mechanism of representation in the past was by deputies (*wakāls*) that were appointed by people on government order. These representatives can be understood as aristocrats who convened substantial power during the time of Zaher Shah's rule. They and their descendants are reportedly the bigger landowners of irrigated land today. *Wakāl* and *arbāb* were the most important power holders at the local level in the past. Only with the end of the monarchy under Daūd's presidency their power began to cease. With the takeover of the communist government and the following Soviet occupation *arbābs* and *wakāl* disappeared in their role of representatives from the public scene.

In terms of decision-making and representation informants unanimously stated that *arbābs* were replaced by commanders (during Soviet occupation and the following civil war and Taliban rule) and they again by CDCs (Community Development Councils) since ousting of Taliban and start of the implementation of the National Solidarity Program (NSP) in 2003 – at least formally. The common perception is that something – the institutions of an *arbāb*, commander, NSP-council – has been imposed from above or rather externally upon people and they have to go along with it, no matter if the institutions are legitimate in their opinion or not. People are used to living their individual lives parallel to changing power holders and their respective rules, most of the time they are only concerned with survival and attempt to distance themselves as much as possible from official or governmental policies and proceedings. Expectations towards the state or administration have always been near to non-existent, only recently expectations are being expressed which the government is falling short of and unable to meet.

An important feature that distinguishes Farkhār and Warsaj districts from many other areas in Afghanistan over the course of the last three decades is the fact that neither the Soviet forces nor the Taliban had been able to gain a foothold in either district. Farkhār was clearly more exposed to frontline fighting with the Soviet troops and the Taliban since the frontline was constantly shifting in the area between Farkhār town (beyond the villages of Shingān-e bālā, Nahr-e Āb etc.) and Tāloqān, mostly concentrating on a deserted stretch of land called Dasht-e rubā. The overarching figure in the area was Ahmad Shah Masood, leader of the *shurā-ye nazār* and *jami'at*. His coming to power involved a power struggle with *hizb-e islamī*-sympathizers and forces of Gulbuddin Hikmatyar. Communities in Farkhār and Warsaj seem to have 'sympathized' with either one of the *mujāhedin* fractions. Due to Masood's charisma and military strength of *jami'at* he was able to supplant his rival *hizb-e islamī* and turned both districts into strongholds of *jami'at*. He appointed big sub-commanders for each district (*āmīr*) and also lower-level commanders for bases and stations he maintained. The reason for Masood's presence and popularity was the direct link of Farkhār with the Panjshēr valley via Miyanshahr, the main valley of Warsaj. Furthermore after he had married a woman from Panjshēr he set up his home in Qauwanduz valley/Warsaj where part of his family is still living today.

The most visible basis of Masood – because it is still maintained as something like a museum or at least a public venue – is located in Chaman-e Khusdeh amidst a park laid out by Zaher Shah. This is the farthest place the Taliban ever came in larger numbers. After Masood had given up the base temporarily they established their base at the site in representational form. It is located beyond Farkhār town into the direction of Warsaj. To Warsaj proper Taliban reportedly came from one day to one week – according to varying accounts of informants and their place of living in Warsaj itself. A common distinction that is being drawn by people is the one between 'original Taliban' (mostly called *kandaharī*) from Kandahar, Helmand, Pakistan etc. on the one side and local Taliban (*mahallī*) on the other side. The latter were

mostly locals who had been studying in Pakistan or even came 'home' together with the Taliban movement from the South, others were single mullahs, but as a rule mostly the bigger part of the male population of one community turned Taliban overnight putting on long turbans in order to escape harassment and to get by without harm. Thus their behaviour can be interpreted as plain, though opportunistic, survival strategy. The kandaharī Taliban that arrived in Farkhār were not very strong and without support from their leadership. According to informants no communication took place between these Kandaharī in Chaman-e Khusdeh with other Taliban units in other parts of the country, or even Takhār.

## 4 Farkhār

With the introduction of administrative reforms in 1963/64 Farkhār was constituted as 4<sup>th</sup> degree *wuluswālī* (district) of Takhār province (Adamec 1972: 175). It consists of approximately 58 villages<sup>3</sup>. The following paragraphs present a brief overview of the district's ethnic structures, religious characteristics as well as a short summary of the broader socio-economic situation before going into detail in the specific governance-focused sub-chapters.

### 4.1 Overview of Farkhār district

#### 4.1.1 Ethnic Composition and Religious Sketch of the District's Communities

The majority of the people inhabiting the two main valleys of Farkhār district (*tagau-e chap*, *tagau-e rāst*) are Tajiks.<sup>4</sup> They believe that their ancestors inhabited the region for hundreds of years, initially accessing the area from the mountain passes of Badakhshan or Panjshēr or via the plain of Tāloqān (formerly Qataghan). Hazara, Pashtuns, Arab and Gujir/Asmārī constitute the other ethnic groups found in Farkhār.

Pashtuns are said to live almost exclusively in Farkhār town today, making a living from shopkeeping and trading. Very few scattered Pashtun families reportedly live jointly with people of other ethnic backgrounds; mixed settlements are located rather in close proximity to the town of Farkhār. Nāqelān – a village on the other side of the river and the road from Tāloqān approximately half an hour before reaching the district center – seems to be the only village with an exclusively Pashtun population. Their ancestors – single families of the Mangal, Ma'sudi, Zadrān, Tutakhēl and Logari tribes from Paktia province – came to the area around sixty years ago when they were allocated land in accordance with Nāder Shāh's settlement policy. After the ousting of the Taliban from the district Pashtuns were forced to leave their homes and villages and seek refuge in Pakistan. They were accused of active collaboration with the Taliban. Only through reconciliation efforts of UNAMA and UNHCR could the resettlement of Nāqelān-Pashtuns from Pakistan be negotiated with the local population. Other villages where formerly (before 2001) Pashtuns had been living still strongly oppose their return. Local people's attitude towards them is very hostile because they are said to have blocked the main road and treated non-Pashtuns badly at the time of the Taliban.. It is most likely that the successful resettlement of the people of Nāqelān could be achieved because the local commander is powerful and disposes of substantial enforcement capacities, thus, was able to guarantee UN-agencies that the returnees would not be harmed.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> According to Concern's project proposal there are 56 villages in Farkhār. (See IDEAS project proposal p.8.) A confirmed number will probably only be available after the NSP-programme will have totally covered the district with surveys (and projects).

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR (2002) estimated the total population in Farkahr district to be 50.000 – 60.000. The ethnic composition was given as consisting of 5% Hazara, 94% Tajik and a very small scatch of other ethnic groups.

<sup>5</sup> For this he signed a letter with the UNAMA-representative.

In local perception Gujir/Asmārī<sup>6</sup> are equated with Pashtuns who on their part are undifferentiated lumped together with being Taliban and Al Qaeda sympathizers.<sup>7</sup> Although Gujir are not Pashtuns and neither related to them in ethnic and linguistic terms, they shared the fate of expulsion and violent displacement from Farkhār with ethnic Pashtuns. A larger number of displaced Gujir reportedly went to Kunduz.<sup>8</sup> As with Pashtuns, their return is strongly opposed by locals of other ethnicities as well. Gujir interviewed in Chehraz reported several attempts to loot their houses in neighboring villages. One building was burned with a woman and two kids dying in the flames.

‘agar nān-e sobhrā paydā kunēm nān-e shabrā paydā namākunēm; mā khān nēstēm’  
=if we can find the breakfast we cannot find the dinner; we are no khāns=

The Gujir are originally nomads and descend from Gujirat region of Northwest India. The Gujir interviewed reported that their grandfathers’ generation – 35 mosque communities<sup>9</sup> – had come to Farkhār either from Lagman or Kunar, where a large community of them settles. Their origin can still be made out since they speak Dari in a dialect very close to Hindustani/Gujir(at)i. Their livelihood is mainly based on animal husbandry with seasonal migration to higher pastures; they are landless. Local farmers who cultivate lalm̄ plots high up the hills sometimes have Gujir harvest their crops for a share of it. Gujir themselves are only to a limited extent engaging in dry land cultivation or other agricultural activities. Their villages are at far points from other settlements, though they jointly use the Friday praying and Eid praying mosques with neighboring Tajik or mixed villages. There is no uniform pattern for marriages: While Gujir from Chehraz for example only marry with other Gujir, Khafdara-Gujir reportedly also intermarry with Tajiks of Āb-e Dara/Nahr-e Āb etc.

A village cluster known to be inhabited by ‘Arab’ is found on the way from Tāloqān to Farkhār, approximately half an hour drive from the district center. The main place is called Karānī, but ‘Arab’ are supposed to live also in a couple settlements leading up the Totak valley beyond Karānī, in all there are reportedly six ‘Arab’ villages in the area. As their Tajik co-villagers these ‘Arab’ are Farsi-speaking, ‘Arab’ is their self-designation; they claim to be descendants of the Arabian Abbāsi tribe, members of which left the Arab peninsula centuries ago in the course of Islamization. In terms of further division people consider themselves to belong to four sub-tribes of the Abbās: Ghazi, Haydari, Duwasi, Azimi. Regarding their marriage relationships informants stated that they intermarry mostly with Tajiks, but also with women of other ethnic origin, e.g. a recent case of a Karānī villager marrying a Pashtun girl was given as example.

Apparently non-‘Arab’ neighbors see the Tajik-speaking ‘Arab’ critical, they have been called ‘insurgents’ after they had left Totak valley, their original settlement location, for the place at the roadside in close proximity to the river. According to informants from the neighboring Shingān across the river, the ‘Arab’ occupied their land at the riverside. From Karānī cases of intra-village violent conflicts were reported, the ending of which in times required the involvement of 40 policemen.

The Hazara of Farkhār district live mainly outside of town. Cheshma Garmak is the only village surveyed that is said to have an exclusively Hazara population (200 families). More Hazara are living in joint settlements with Tajiks, e.g. in Pofar. Contrary to all the above mentioned ethnic groups who are Hanafi Sunni, Hazara are aligned with Imami Shi’ism which recognizes the twelve successive imams beginning with Ali as legitimate successors of the prophet Muhammad.

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<sup>6</sup> ICG 2003: Peace-building in AFG, p. 5. Asmārī and also Gujir are terms used by the people themselves for self-designation.

<sup>7</sup> This view and claims of Tajiks that Gujir would be stealers etc. show, on the one hand, how pronounced existing stereotypes and prejudices are among the majority of Farkhār’s population, on the other hand that knowledge about actual coherences is extremely limited.

<sup>8</sup> According to ICG 2003 Tajik commanders claimed they had allegedly destroyed pistachio trees. At the same time they were being accused of supporting the Taliban.

<sup>9</sup> In the 1970<sup>th</sup> the total number of Gujir inhabiting northeastern Afghanistan were presumably 5000 (Fischer 1970: 29; Grötzbach 1972: 987). Their main source of income was historically goat breeding. Still they are the only inhabitants in the region who do not take part in labor migration to other countries.

Field research did not reveal any kind of religious discrimination towards Shi'ites or other conflicts or tensions because of people's religious attitudes. Religious questions in interviews came up only in relation with questions regarding the researchers' view on aspects of Christianity and Islam. This seems to be worth mentioning at this point since religion has never been an issue in research in Kunduz province for example. Further noticeable was the fact that quite a lot of villages we visited are currently building new madrasa and mosques, e.g. in Nahr-e Āb, Nāqelān, Khusdeh. For example, in Khusdeh a huge mosque 30 meters by 18 meters to fit 1350 persons inside for prayers is currently under construction. The building of the mosque is a joint effort: General Dāud is said to finance the bricks, further he helped getting the metal girder and joints that had been left behind by the Russians at Kunduz airport. The work is carried out by the villagers themselves; three to four neighboring villages which will also use the mosque for Friday prayers and Eid praying contributed money (7.000-8.000 AFs). The place for the mosque had to be bought for 150.0000 AFs. As soon as the construction will be finished, a mullah from the 10-12 mullahs in the village cluster will be appointed. Furthermore 30 qārī are supposed to live in Khusdeh and adjoining villages. More persons from Farkhār are studying Islamic subjects in Pakistan and Kabul etc.

Finally Pashtun nomads (kuchī) are worth mentioning separately (though not an ethnic group by themselves) since they add at least temporarily each year to the landscape of people in Farkhār. They pass through the district with their animals from May to October. A common route comes from the Kunduz and Takhār plains leading up to the nomads' traditional grazing grounds (ailāq) in the higher mountains of Badakhshan. Kuchī have reportedly no deep-going relationships with local Pashtuns; there are rare cases of daughters' exchange, though. Gujir said they would sometimes barter basic necessities with passing-by kuchī families. Conflicts between kuchī and local herders could not be tracked.

#### 4.1.2 Socio-economic Situation

People of Farkhār describe themselves as very poor. The most important source of income constitutes labor migration to Iran. Besides, people make a living from seasonal labor migration, agricultural farming, and animal husbandry. Trade and handicraft are of minor importance. While trade is limited to Farkhār town, scattered workshops of carpenters and weavers can be found in the side-valleys and far-off villages. For example, in Khānaqā many people – men and women – earn additional income from chapān-weaving. For this they rely on old supply relationships for dyed cotton threads from Mazar-i Sharif. While in the past Khānaqā was a famous and popular commercial center for chapān trading – in summer they had twenty sheep killed daily to sell the meat – the economic situation is rather difficult today. Their ready-made chapāns are first and foremost being sold in the bazaar of Tāloqān. Despite the village's relative loss of importance as a regional trading and fabric manufacturing center people are still glad to have this additional income opportunity again and it can be interpreted as an indicator for peace. As one informant put it, 'In times of stability chapāns can be sold, in times of instability people rather buy wheat.'

Except for Chehraz with its Gujir population all of the villages surveyed had substantial numbers of men – according to informants often four of one family or 50-60% of all grown-up males of one village – working in Iran. Although numbers always have to be treated with caution and the numbers of people living in the respective villages vary very much according to sources, the following may well give an impression of the extent of economic dependency of the district on Iran: Thus, Shingān-e bālā has reportedly 40 persons in Iran, Khānaqā 150, Khafdara 200 (up to 300 leave each year for Iran), Karānī 120, Mashtān village cluster of five villages 200-500. The natural environment with its scarcity of arable land and pastures throughout the whole district does not provide sufficient income possibilities for all the people. Farming generates merely enough for survival on subsistence level. Who does not go to Iran or cannot go anymore heads into the direction of Tāloqān and Kunduz for seasonal labor, especially during harvest time for wheat and rice weeping (e.g. also Gujir) and before that for transplanting rice saplings.

'zindagi-ye mardum dar sar-e Irān ast'

=our people live on Iran=

Iran has proven to be the basis of survival for people from Farkhār at a time when the population increased to an extent that also the surrounding provinces were neither providing sufficient income opportunities nor enough food anymore 30-35 years back. Ever-growing population pressure, exhausted natural resources, large-scale violent political conflict in the past 30 years and at the same time exacerbating socio-economic demands like increasing bride prices have all been offset by illegal labor migration to Iran throughout these years. The yearly earnings a person can make in Iran vary according to the skills of the worker, an unskilled laborer can get as much as 200.000 AFs (4.000 USD) in one year. In many cases men stay in Iran for several years, now and then sending money home via the hawala-system. Others return after 3-6 or 12 months, invest the money they have earned either in land, buying or building a house, getting engaged or marrying, buying a car, a shop in town (Tāloqān) etc. The usual procedure seems to be that people do these activities one at a time going back and forth between Iran and their home. This way Iran has been the basis of relative wealth and improvement of the socio-economic situation in Farkhār district. Very few people reportedly also work in Saudi Arabia, though the movements to and from Saudi Arabia and also Dubai are not as dynamic as in the case with Iran. Most community members who migrated to Saudi Arabia in the past are still there and it is unknown if they will ever come back.

It is worth mentioning that the majority of the labor-migrants are not recruited from the poorest sediments of rural society. This is due to the fact that it has become more difficult in the last years and will get even more complicated in the near future to seek work in Iran.<sup>10</sup> Therefore one has to have the ability to raise the money for the journey (smugglers and/or passport with limited visa and working permit) by ceding land property to another person for the amount of time that is intended to be spend abroad. Thus, not only people who do not own land, but the more so those, whose families have land plots, decide to seek jobs abroad. If the temporary emigrant manages to earn money he takes his land back after his return, for the same amount of money he had conceded it. Should he not be able to 're-buy' his land it will either be lost or the agreement's term can be extended for another year or so. This practice – ceding one's land for money with the option to regain it for the same amount of money, the profit for the backer being the harvest – is called *gerau*.

## 4.2 Institutions

### 4.2.1 Resources Management

From the field visits in Farkhār it became clear that the inhabitants are living at the limits of natural resources availability. The mountainous environment sets natural constraints for arable land, pastures, forests and water use. Absolute population growth during more than half a century, and decades of conflict have left obvious traces in the socio-economic and environmental conditions of the district. While water as a resource for drinking and irrigation is generally not scarce because most settlements are located along contributory streams flowing into Farkhār River, pastures, arable land and forests are crucially exploited. This is also true for quarry, including birds, and fishes.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore all kinds of plants which grow wild in the mountains or along the streams are being used either as herbs or – after drying – for heating and cooking. Even grit, sand and stones are extracted on large-scale from riverbeds and transported away with trucks to build houses etc.

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<sup>10</sup> For the shift in the Iranian immigration and labor market policy see RFE/RL 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Birds are being hunted because, on the one hand, they might harm the harvest, and on the other hand they are fitted into the seasonal diet. Although deer hunting was prohibited at the time of Zāher Shāh the deer population diminished significantly during the wartime. Fishing is popular and done by hooks and nets although only the former is in accordance with the law.

Box 2: Land Cover in Farkhār District<sup>12</sup>

Rangeland	45%
Rain fed Crops	30%
Irrigated Land	5%
Fruit Trees	1%
Pistachio Trees	1%
Natural Forest	10%
Rock	3%
Permanent Snow	5%

### Arable land

Although in the past the amount of arable land has been extended to the limits by cutting down trees and cultivating land plots in direct proximity to the rivers and streams, it has not proven to be sufficient to feed and give work to the growing number of people. As a general tendency most cultivated land is rain-fed (*lalm̄*) with one possible harvest of wheat or rye a year if precipitation allows for it. For example, in 2006, limited rainfall made cultivation of crops in *lalm̄* areas impossible. For *lalm̄* land which is mostly stretched up the hills until the very top and in many cases encompasses areas that were originally covered by trees no private ownership is known, though for example people in Mashtān had to pay taxes for *lalm̄* land until two years ago.<sup>13</sup> As a rule pastures as well as *lalm̄* land belong to the government. Only irrigated land (*āb̄*) is individually owned with the owners holding respective documents. Thus, given that only around five percent of the overall arable land comprises of irrigated land owned by individuals the small number of big landowners (6-10) in the district can be explained easily.

The fragmentation of a household's landholdings because of inheritance tradition causes severe problems: as a result of the sub-division of a father's land among all sons (and daughters) land plots tend to get smaller and smaller and do not provide sufficient income and work for sons' families. Against this background and given the rapid population growth the question comes to mind why the households' landholdings have not diminished to not manageable mini-plots yet. There are several factors feeding into an explanation; the most plausible being that families find some kind of agreement of either having the sons jointly work on the land inherited from their father or that they engage in some kind of risk and income generation sharing. Actually, according to informants both strategies are being followed. The latter often involves one son staying at home working on the land and the others leaving their village for seasonal work in the neighbouring provinces or migrating for far-off labour to Iran.

Since land for cultivation is so limited, it is subject to (potential) inter-ethnic and intra-family conflict. For example, in Shingān-e bālā, which has an exclusively Tajik population, grievances exist towards Pashtun landowners in the neighbouring village of Nāqelān who reportedly own bigger plots of *āb̄*-land, up to 30-50 jerib per household. The perceived injustice goes more than half a century back to the year 1332 when the Afghan government had the arable land surveyed and decided to offer the land not owned by anybody up to that date to 65 local families. When it turned out that they could not afford to buy it, Pashtuns from other parts of the country were invited to settle here. The general indisposition of the Tajiks roots in the idea that Pashtuns are alien to the area and should have never gotten the right to come here for permanent settlement.

<sup>12</sup> IDEAS Project proposal 2003, 9.

<sup>13</sup> But the reason for the tax collection seems to be owned by the fact that the area had been irrigated in the past. According to informants remnants of old canal structures exist in these *lalm̄* areas hinting at former usage as taxable *āb̄*-land. As such it is not used anymore because the know-how of how to irrigate the slope got lost. From Shingān-e pāyin it is known that land plots at hillsides were bought by people from the government in the past when cultivating these lands was possible. This is not the case anymore since 1380.



Another sustaining pattern that holds for generalization is the large amount of landless found in the area (on average more than fifty percent of the population). This problem is harsher the further one moves away from the district centre up the hills and valleys. Khānaqā and Mashtān are cases in point. In these far-away locations people often do not grow any crops on *ābī*-land, merely gardens close to *havāīs* can be irrigated.

### Pastures and livestock

Animal husbandry is an alternative income generating activity for many families since in dry years herding on *lalmī* land is still possible. The pasture areas (partly called *jangal*) are government-owned – like everything that grows on them (trees etc.). Usually valleys display quite natural boundaries for pastures, thus, within the valleys each village has the right to access the pasture areas up the hills whereby inhabitants of one settlement use the pastures jointly. For example, in the case of Khānaqā which consists of five sub-villages and mosques each *qaria* sends their animals (5-7 per family) separately to the pastures where all the animals of the surrounding settlements graze together. Herding is organized among the livestock owners of one *qaria* by daily rotation of the pastor by family.

Research revealed no special accounts of conflicts among pasture users from the area or even with outsiders. The conventional explanation was that there is enough pasture area for all animals. *Kuchī* from Tāloqān and Kunduz come regularly every year with their animals (camels, sheep, goats, cattle) to the pasture areas in the hills in the direction of Warsaj. People in Mashtān take this as an occasion to rent their pastures out to *kuchī* for two to three months.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly enough, the money generated by this practice is fed back into the community by using it for collective purposes like mosque repair, bridge building, accommodating and hosting guests etc. *Kuchī* coming to the area are usually on their way from the lowlands to higher pastures (*ailāq*) in the mountains of Badakhshan. *Gujir* from Chehraz also reported that people of the surrounding villages sell pastures and grass to *kuchī*.

'zaminhā-ye ke dar koh'st zaminhā-ye khudā'st'  
=the land up in the mountains belongs to God=

Apart from pastures being used by *kuchī* and local people who also engage in crop cultivation, *Gujir* form a third user group which depends exclusively on pastures and livestock breeding as their only source of income. For the example of Chehraz, due to their wronged location kilometres up the hills in rather inaccessible stretches of land they do without water except from springs and snow in the winter. Thus, from spring until the end of Ramazān everybody except some elders who stay behind to guard the houses is on the move, migrating via Mashtān to Gurdara. Their right to access for pastures in Gurdara goes back to the plain fact that they are from the same ('right') valley (*tagau-e rāst*) of Farkhār. Rent payments for pasture usage are not required. Initially this direction for seasonal pasture migration roots in kinship relationships Chehraz *Gujir* used to have with *Gujir* in Gurdara. This is not anymore the case because Mashtān villagers expelled the *Gujir*'s relatives from the community and moved into their houses.

### Forest/wood

Regarding the current situation and past changes in forest or tree cover of the district quite contradictory statements have been recorded from informants. The general impression solidifying in the researchers' mind is linked to the obvious existence of a high degree of appreciation of the problem. For once people admit that firewood is one of the main concerns and difficulties they are faced with when harsh winters set in high up the mountains; secondly, a certain feeling of guilt or regret could be filtered out. This manifested in statements like for example from people in Shingān-e bālā who said they themselves tried to prevent extensive cutting of trees as much as they could, culminating in the claim they even would have killed for the sake of the trees. They reported to have had lots of forest until 50-60 years ago, the bulk of which has been cut during the last 20 years, allegedly by others, not people of their village. During the time of the fight against the Russians – the frontline ran in close distance – 50

<sup>14</sup> Reportedly long-lasting relationships (trading, money-borrowing or social) with *kuchī*-families do not exist since these are not the same persons who return every year, but different families.

donkey loads of firewood were cut daily at times. Other reasons given for intensified cutting include the need for firewood and lack of fuel for cooking in order to feed groups of mujāhedīn (50-60 people) every night (Khānaqā).

Environmental and climate conditions have their effects on the reforestation capability and growing perspectives of newly planted saplings: they only grow very slowly and need special regulations, e.g. grazing prohibitions. Systematic care of the forest stock could not be achieved in the past, despite the claim that forest guards have been in charge of protecting the forest throughout the times of turmoil and fighting. Given the fact that even before the onset of violent conflict in Afghanistan forest management merely consisted of protection and fining/punishment but did not foresee any regeneration efforts, it is no wonder that significantly more trees were cut than planted, though in Mashtān and Khānaqā for example people claimed to always plant two to three new trees after they cut one. New saplings are planted near people's gardens where irrigation is possible. In Huteh a wealthy returnee from Iran set up a fruit tree plantation with 10.000 trees outside the village. He had to dig an irrigation canal of one kilometer length.

In some communities wood is used for heating in the winter but to spare precious resources they cook with dung or special plants (e.g. khār) collected in the mountains. Informants in Khānaqā reported a severe shortage of firewood; they would now even have to cut fruit trees during winter time in order to keep their houses warm. This could be an indicator for advanced deforestation in the valleys surrounding the village. In Khafdara researchers witnessed that donkey loads of firewood were being transported to villagers' houses. According to the chief of the forest department who is from the same village, people can be prevented from cutting pistachio trees but given their poor economical situation how can they be prevented cutting archa/acorn. Thus, although officially prohibited, large-scale illegal archa tree cutting is happening in the mountains outside Khafdara. Even the ban on cutting of dried-up trees for firewood cannot be enforced effectively.

### Box 3: muhāfiz-e jangal/forest warden

The Forest department in Farkhār town is part of the district's Department of Agriculture. With 13 employees the Forest department is in charge of guarding and protecting the forests of the whole district all year around. Given the limited number of staff valleys are being sub-divided between 2-3 forest wardens for oversight. The institution of forest wardens in Farkhār did already exist under the rule of Zaher Shah, at that time the department employed six guards. In addition every community appointed their own person to prevent illegal cutting and theft of pistachio nuts close to harvest time. Currently some villages still seem to have their own local guards and the government is largely relying on local informants to report illegal cutting of wood. Governmental wardens are reporting to their department chief – mudir-e jangalāt – who then passes the information on to another department (Chief of Police, Dept. of Criminal Investigation/Legal Dept.) for persecution – either demanding the payment of a fine or imposing a term of imprisonment upon the thief.

### Pistachio trees

Pistachio 'forest' is found in the lower parts of Farkhār Valley, though compared to forests known from Europe they remind rather of open woodlands with an estimated average of 20-40 trees per hectare (UNEP 2003). In locations higher up the mountains, e.g. in Khānaqā and Mashtān, the climate is too cold for pistachio trees. Villagers in these higher parts have some walnut trees the harvest of which provides just enough nuts for own consumption.

'agar haywānāt nabāshad kohhā sar-sabz khāhad bud'  
=if there were no animals the mountains would be green=

The main problem with reforestation and maintenance of the pistachio cultivations seems to rest – on the one side – in the need for grazing areas. The relatively large stocks of animals owned by local people

harm existing trees to quite an extent: sheep and especially goats eat the branches of the trees which then dry up.<sup>15</sup> Besides, self-seeded saplings do not have any chance of growing up due to year-round grazing in the woodlands/pastures. On the other side, even if saplings could be protected from grazing animals, irrigation would pose a major challenge. For these reasons, if at all, newly planted trees (usually fruit trees, no pistachios) are found in people's garden plots only.

As with other trees pistachio trees are not individually owned, but belong to the government. Even if land with pistachio trees growing on it is privately owned, the trees are state or common property. Customary rules regulate which hillsides belong to which village. When harvest time is approaching many villages appoint their own forest wardens<sup>16</sup> who guard the pistachios in addition to the government's guards in order to prevent large-scale theft of pistachios from people of the neighboring villages/side valleys/commanders. A general approach for harvesting and customary ownership of the nut harvest seems to originate in affiliation of tree growing areas to a certain Friday mosque visitors-territory.

For example, in the case of Shingān-e bālā all four villages that share the same Friday-praying mosque have the right to take part in harvesting the pistachios of the mantiqa. In practice this means everybody can go to collect pistachios any place he/she likes within the territory attached to these villages. Usually the governmental forest wardens are in charge of announcing the beginning of the harvest. This does not imply though, that they have the knowledge and competence of determining when the nuts are ripe and the harvest shall start. Rather they are being informed and instructed by the district's agricultural department. In Shingān-e bālā people reported to have collected 3-5 ser on average in what was perceived to be a very good harvest in 2006. This amount allows them to sell pistachios and to increase their income significantly. Further they reported that the current amount of trees adjoining the mantiqa would be sufficient for their needs, merely the neighbors' attempts of illegal pistachio collections is perceived to be a major problem. The same informants also don't see a reason why they should start planting pistachio trees. Their line of argumentation goes like this: 'If I plant trees on my land these trees will belong to the government and everybody will be invited and have the right to collect the pistachios. So I rather go along without planting any trees and have more grazing land for my livestock.' Thus, pasture areas for animals are an important factor in this reasoning, because pasture land is perceived to be very scarce.

### Water

In comparison with the natural resources discussed above research showed that water availability was not perceived as major problem. Merely few cases could be observed where people did not have access to water because of their remote location high up the mountains. For example the Gujir of Chehraz exploit some higher streams for drinking purposes, though it is not sufficient for year-round feeding of their animals. Springs are not privately owned. As a rule water is being carried in cans and buckets from the rivers and streams. This is mainly the task of the women and children. For irrigation purposes some communities appoint a water manager (*mārāb*) who is in charge of canal and intake maintenance as well as water regulation in times of oversupply. Contrary to other parts of Afghanistan, e.g. Kunduz province, scarcity of water is not the main problem that has to be taken care of, in Farkhār it is rather to prevent as much as possible damage to fields and canals from the yearly snowmelt in spring. Not all communities have a *mārāb*, e.g. Mashtān.

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<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, a certain wild animal seems to prefer the roots of the pistachio trees for its diet.

<sup>16</sup> Elders are always 'the people' in charge of appointments.

#### Box 4: mārāb/water manager

The mārābs of the streams in Farkhār are far less important in comparison with their colleagues in other parts of Afghanistan where big agricultural areas depend on irrigation water and its management, thus where the mārāb is mainly responsible for equal distribution among all the water users along a canal in times of water shortages as well as canal maintenance and intake construction. Since the area suitable for irrigation is very limited in Farkhār (5%)<sup>17</sup>, the mārāb's job is first and foremost to protect fields and smaller irrigation canals from flood damages caused by the seasonal snowmelt. Research showed that communities sharing one FPM appointed one mārāb collectively in spring (months of hamal-saur/21 March-21 May). For example, in the case of Shingān-e bālā, Shingān-e payin, Nāqelān and Kundakaw 4-5 elders of every community select the mārāb as a rule from Shingān-e bālā, the village upstream close to the intake. Every land-owning household pays half a ser of wheat per jerib for the water manager.

#### 4.2.2 Representation and Decision-making

The implementation of the NSP programme in Farkhār started in 2005. Thus, only one part of the communities could so far be covered with community development actions in the framework of the NSP. Besides infrastructure projects the programme aims at improving local governance by establishing new decision-making bodies at community levels by the election of Community Development Councils (CDCs). These we found to be very much in accordance with already existing decision making structures, namely elders' councils. The two significant differences from a theoretical point of view seem to be that (a) the CDC is supposed to be a permanently institutionalized body while the elders gather upon need without holding regular meetings, and (b) that officially women are participating in CDCs. In reality though, even the NSP-councils are found to be rather situational institutions – in people's minds they are temporarily necessary to access funds made available by the government via the facilitating partner (Concern) to finance one or two infrastructural projects. The broader cause of the NSP is generally not acknowledged or taken redundant. As for women's participation it became clear that shurā-meetings are never attended by women. Thus what can be concluded about decision-making structures and representation in the communal arena is that little change occurred with the implementation of the NSP-programme. Elders are the main actors in charge of decision-making, they are either constituting the NSP-shurā themselves or the (with the consent of the elders) elected NSP-shurā members consult the elders' council before they take a decision (e.g. Mashtān). In some communities NSP-members were reportedly appointed as result of an elders' shurā (Khānaqā). As for representation, the head of the CDC – if not one of the important elders himself – would always have an elder by his side when meeting with visitors, NGO-representatives or others. The same holds true if they appeal to the district government, e.g. in cases of conflict resolution. We found in many cases that the NSP-chief was one of the important elders himself; often being from a family that had commissioned also the former arbāb (e.g. in Shingān-e bālā).

On average a community assembled around one mosque would have up to five important elders who are respected by their fellow villagers. The population going to one Friday mosque could have up to 10-12 of such elders. 'Elders' are not necessarily old men with white beards, but on the contrary can be in their thirties, forties. Essential characteristics for them to have are a good power of judgment, rhetorical skills and some wealth in order to be able to host guests and help out people in need, with money or food.<sup>18</sup> If a decision involving more than one community has to be taken, elders of neighbouring communities are invited for a shurā. If, for example, a conflict between two villages has to be solved elders and other community members of the two conflicting villages come together and are being joined by elders of a

<sup>17</sup> IDEAS Project proposal 2003, 9.

<sup>18</sup> In cases of acute emergencies/natural hazards people turn to relatives for help in the first place, only then they turn to elders who are known for having a certain stock of wheat etc. at their disposal (the same mechanism is in place in case people need money – first they sell their land, then turn to relatives, lastly to elders.

third village. Usually the mullah of the local mosque is acting as advisor and resource person to the elders' council if legal issues have to be sorted out.

Box 5: mullah *gārī*/role of religious leader in the community

As with the water manager, forest warden etc. the elders of a community are also in charge of appointing a mullah for their local mosque. In many cases the mullah is chosen among the religiously educated persons of the same community, sometimes though – especially in communities at the entrance of the broader Farkhār valley – a mullah is really sought for and 'hired' from far away. Usually the choosing of a mullah (mullah *gārī*) takes place at the beginning of Ramazān for a one-year period. The conditions are negotiated individually, in Shingān-e payin for example (where the mullah was appointed from a far place) it was agreed to pay him three ser of wheat, the skin of sheep sacrificed at Eid-e qurbān, money in case somebody would die, meals three times daily, shelter, clothes etc. The tasks of the mullah include - besides calling for and leading prayers - teaching children to read the qor'ān, assisting the elders in conflict resolution matters, especially if legal issues are concerned since these are usually decided on the basis of shari'at.

In most cases, though, it seems that decisions are being taken on the basis of consensus among all parties involved. Shari'at-law can be applied for certain cases (adultery, killing, stealing), but often knowledge about Islamic law seems to be limited and decision-making customarily based on commonsense is perceived to somehow inhibit Islamic values since people are all Muslim. The role of the mullah is therefore in most cases constrained to give advice to the elders as well as to approve and testify decisions and agreements.

As most important institution for decision-making elders are also always involved in conflict resolution. Three patterns of conflict resolution have been found most common:<sup>19</sup> First, if the conflict is localized and one of the conflicting parties appealed to the elders, they decide on how to solve it; most often they enforce some kind of compensation for injustice or harm/loss the victim suffered. If both parties accept the elders' ruling, the conflict is settled. Secondly, and this seems to be more and more the case nowadays, the elders' decision is not accepted by the conflicting parties and they appeal to the government (district level justice department or *wuluswāl*). This is usually the case when one party has enough money and expects to solve the conflict in its own favour by bribing government officials. Whatever the case, a final decision is usually not made at district level, though the district authorities may also invite the elders for consultation (e.g. in Mashtān where the elders were not able to solve a conflict). Instead, after reviewing, the case is referred back to the community's elders for resolution. Thirdly, more and more people, especially younger community members refer directly to government agencies in case of conflict. As above, the referring back of the issue to the local elders' council applies also for these cases.

To draw conclusions from the above about the relationship between locals and the government: Government agencies are apparently hesitant to engage in local dispute resolution and local affairs. On the one hand government personnel is guarding the forest, and *mārābs* as well as NSP-members are registered and officially confirmed by the respective government departments, but for true engagement the problem solving capacity is non-existent. Neither are the institutions and government agencies at district level acting objectively and independently. Punishment for premeditated murder for instance is always subject to negotiation. Enforcement power can only be attributed to the security forces. This does not imply that they are not exclusively acting on their own behalf. Interestingly enough the power of force matches the expectations of average people in the villages; as one informant put it: 'All we expect from the government is security.'

<sup>19</sup> In case of murder the government is involved right away, usually searching and arresting the murderer and opening a criminal case at court. In general terms, the rules applied for conflict resolution depend on the specific type and magnitude of conflict.

### 4.3 Conflicts and Security

Most conflicts seem to revolve temporarily about resource allocation issues – be it natural resources<sup>20</sup> or financial resources in terms of aid and the establishment of infrastructural projects at certain locations. As a rule a majority of conflicts is also influenced by old-time grievances that possibly exist between people or members of different communities. These sometimes go back as far as the time of the civil war that unfolded in Afghanistan from the beginning of the 1990s. Opposition, temporary merging and mutual killing of *jami'at* and *hizb-e islamī/Hikmatyār* followers left traces in people's minds. After the withdrawal of the Soviet forces and the lost cause of *jihād*, commanders became influential by famously killing former allies and displaying brutal leadership skills. Today these commanders are still around – if they were big commanders they still have their extended family network in the district and themselves taken on prestigious government jobs in Kabul or elsewhere. Formerly less important commanders now possess territorially limited influence making a living as teachers, farmers or seeking jobs in Iran. A medium stratum of former commanders is made up of people who do not have direct influence in Farkhār district anymore but are active and exert influence in neighbouring provinces.

On the contrary, the heavyweights' influence is significant throughout Farkhār district. Few figures are capable of controlling violence and the use of force by less weighty commanders. Within the framework of the DIAG-process local commanders started to turn in weapons on 22 June 2006. There is reason to believe that many weapons still remain with locals. Poppy and opium are neither harvested nor smuggled through the district, which means that the potential to participate in this part of the shadow economy is not given and the commanders, except the really big ones, are rather poor.

Violent extra-family conflicts are rare. One was reported from Shingān-e bālā with Karānī village opposite the river about the location for a school building (see box below).

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<sup>20</sup> In Shingān-e bālā for example people threatened to kill anybody who would try to steal pistachios from their *mantīqa* this year. They made their intention public by sending a letter to the *wuluswalī* stating they would kill thieves from the neighboring villages of Kirānī, Nahr-e Ab etc.

### Box 6: School conflict in Shingān-e bālā

After the school was washed away by a flood some 20 years ago existing tensions between Shingān-e bālā and Shingān-e pāyin on the one side and Karānī on the other side of the river went on simmering, escalating into violence from time to time. A second school building was burnt down by Karānī people. Only in 2006, after the local commander had been disarmed, Shingān people dared to refer to the government because they wanted to have a new school built on their side of the river arguing that they had 450 pupils, Karānī on the other side merely 150 and that Karānī villagers would not allow them to build a permanent bridge. Three times Shingān elders had been appealing to the local commander to let them build the bridge. To support their cause for constructing the school they allocated 10 jerib of land and invited government officials from Kabul and Tāloqān for the laying of the foundation stone. When the government delegation of 50 persons including the chiefs of education and security departments arrived they faced a road blockade by Karānī villagers armed with sticks, stones and guns with which they attacked Shingān people, injuring three of their elders badly. In the following weeks tension was at the brink of further escalation. Shingān villagers said they could not dare to pass through Karānī to go to the district center. In order to not face an investigation and a possible law suite a delegation of villagers from Karānī went to the wuluswālī to signal willingness for conciliation. Finally the local commander – on his visit to Karānī during Ramazān – ordered his fellow villagers to allow their neighbors from Shingān to build the bridge. Before he had also allocated four jerib of land for a school-building on the Karānī-side, now two schools are being built, the one in Karānī will get high school-status.

Every village has at least one former commander who still possesses influence and acts on behalf of the villagers. In many cases he is one of the elders in the village. Isolated former Taliban who came from Pakistan are teachers, mullahs or also just farmers, but in many cases at the same time elders. To assess the role of violence in Farkhār's communities a distinction has to be drawn between intra-family and other conflicts. While the former is quite common and often leads to the death of family members, violent conflicts with outsiders have not been reported about extensively. Overall we would suggest that commander structures or the prevalence of weapons with locals does not pose a particular threat to NGO-workers and the implementation of programmes. Nevertheless quite some tension and dissatisfaction with not materializing assistance exist in some communities. Verbal intimations about the possible future use of force against NGO-workers and foreigners should not be treated lightly.

Interethnic conflicts have been reported from the past, especially among Tajiks and Gujir tensions still exist. After and already before the arrival of scattered Taliban forces in Farkhār town and the subsequent joining of some locals of all ethnic belongings with them – in most cases this was just a survival strategy and meant putting on a Taliban-style turban and praying according to their demand – Tajiks tended to lump local Pashtuns, kuchī and Asmārī/Gujir all together and forced them out of their homes, setting houses on fire killing women and children (Khafdara people in Khuzum/Gujir village). Thus, many Gujir were ousted after the fall of the Taliban, the ones who are still in the area were lucky to have Tajik neighbours' support against attempts of expulsion. In the case of Gujir from Chehraz their neighbours from Khusdeh supported them because the Gujir had been fighting with them against the Taliban on the side of jami'at. Actually, people in Khusdeh had initially 'joined' the Talibs in order to save their lives and then – under the leadership of a Taliban-turned-jami'at fighter from their village started to proceed against the Taliban.

'buru kuchī berawād, buru ba tālībā bepaywandād'

=leave kuchī; go, join the taliban=

Because of these incidences grievances still exist. They could not be reduced or mediated, although government deputies supposedly turned up five times, also foreigners. Gujir are still being actively discriminated against, their pastures are sold by people of other ethnic belonging to kuchī from Kunduz

and Baghlān; deputies of government agencies and NGOs are prevented by villagers from further down the valley (Khafdara) to come up to the Gujir's settlements. They do not have the right to take part in the collective pistachio harvest; people from Firingird reportedly regularly attempt to cut the pistachio trees near their houses. So far the Gujir of Chehraz have not been included in any project or survey. Poverty among them is rampant; they do not possess the means to defend themselves, neither in terms of physical or economic strength nor in terms of access to government departments or outside help.

Farkhār is mentioned in the newest UNHCR-analysis on displacements as one of the districts with the highest figures for displaced people throughout the Northeast, their number ranging between 150 and 550.<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Watch cited estimates according to which more than 1.000 Pashtun families from Farkhār have been displaced in the wake of being threatened and after jami'at- forces had looted their houses and property (HRW 2002, 44).

## 5 Warsaj

### 5.1 Overview of Warsaj district

Viewed from the provincial center, Warsaj district is located at the very end of Farkhār river valley, by road only connected to Farkhār and Tāloqān so far, though GTZ is engaged in building a road through to the Panjshēr valley. Warsaj has long had the status of a subdistrict ('alāqadārī) which says something about the modest importance of this region for the socio-economic make-up of the whole district in the past. Recently brand-new administrative facilities (district administration including security commandership) were established three kilometers outside of Khānaqā, the district's commercial center, seat of the sub-offices of the three NGOs working in the district (GTZ, AKF, Concern) and biggest settlement. A place/settlement/village/town by the name Warsaj does not exist.

At the time of field research Concern's staff was working on implementation of the NSP-programme in the very last two 'villages', every other community had already been covered by the NSP-programme. According to Concern's community mobilisers 74 CDCs in 98 settlements (qaria) have been established throughout the last three years. The district is administratively subdivided into four police precincts (hauza) which follow the natural geographic conditions according to which Warsaj consists of three larger valleys (Tarisht, Miyanshahr, Qauwanduz) and Khānaqā as the administrative center.

While the central hauza ('Markaz') is located at the outlet of Qauwanduz and Miyanshahr in the direction of Farkhār and Tāloqān, all three valleys have their own historically evolved linkages with regions outside of Takhār province across the mountain passes. Miyanshahr is related to Panjshēr, Qauwanduz to Badakhshan, Tarisht to Baghlān (via Kalafgan). Due to its relative remoteness the district did not experience heavy fighting during the Taliban time, also the Russians never entered Warsaj. Nevertheless the district played quite a prominent role in the course of jihad against the Russians due to Ahmad Shah Masood's recurrent coming and going from Panjshēr to Farkhār and his place of residence in Dar-e Āb of Qauwanduz.

#### 5.1.1 Ethnic Composition and Religious Sketch of the District's Communities

The population of all four hauza is and has always been exclusively Tajik; therefore ethnic tension or discrimination is not an issue in Warsaj. The Tajiks are Hanafi Sunni, merely a couple communities (e.g. Pyu) towards the tail end of Qauwanduz valley are Isma'ili, a sub-sect of Shia Islam believing in Isma'il, the eldest son of the fifth imam. According to Isma'ili informants in Pyu religious differences do not cause any problems with their Sunni neighbors. For example, there is also no form of affirmative action

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<sup>21</sup> UNHCR 2006, data of July 2006.



approach by AKF towards Aga Khan's follow-believers. In contrary their approach seems to be to help every community or people, regardless of the inhabitants' religious orientation.<sup>22</sup>

Though there is not much diversity in the religious landscape several points have to be mentioned in order to describe the current dynamics found in the field. For once, religion seems to play a very important role in the daily lives of people. According to Concern's community mobilisers who are working in the NSP-programme they are often first asked to help build a mosque when they come to villages in order to explain and implement NSP objectives. It was observed that many mosques were recently built, quite big and rich in style, e.g. in Heyut/Miyanshahr. Locals explained this was possible because of the cash-flow of remittances from Iran and necessary as well due to the existence of many religious dignitaries in the area. Besides mawlawī and mullahs there are a significant number of eshan<sup>23</sup>, and sādāt. The education in local madrasa seems to have been very good in the past, famous Islamic scholars are said to have come to the area to conduct religious education, e.g. in Ashku/Tarisht. This might explain the large number of mullahs. Children attend Koran lessons before and after school. Critical voices mentioned that though there is this high number of religiously educated persons hardly anybody in the past was able to achieve a 12<sup>th</sup> grade school qualification. Two valleys, Tarisht and Miyanshahr, reportedly did not have a single non-religious school until very recently. Thus, if parents wanted their boys to get some kind of education they mostly sent them to Pakistan. For a short period under the Communist government some students from these valleys also went to Khānaqā for studying.

'mā chahār fāmil budēm, hālā pinjā fāmil hastēm'

=where four families were living we are now fifty families=

While from some communities of Miyanshahr and Tarisht a significant number of boys and young men seem to be in Pakistan for religious education, eighteen students of Ashku/Tarisht are currently being educated in mundane subjects at Iranian universities<sup>24</sup> as well as in Afghanistan's biggest cities' universities. Similarly from Heyut some persons are in Poland or Australia. Another incident witnessed was that mawlawī from Pakistani madrasa show up in their former home villages in Tarisht and Miyanshahr to attract young boys to join them for education in Karachi's religious schools. Reportedly many parents reject this offer.

The construction of big mosques is a joint effort of several villages the population of which will use the respective mosque for Friday or Eid praying. Thus, several villages contribute whatever they have at their disposal, some wood, others money. Furthermore few bigger 'donors', single important persons, are known to make contributions. For example for the new mosque in Heyut/Miyanshahr a prominent local figure provided the carpets.

### 5.1.2 Socio-economic Situation

As in Farkhār the population pressure in Warsaj is also high, the valve has been Iran so far, though people from Warsaj also migrate to Dubai, Saudi Arabia and other countries to seek jobs. Furthermore seasonal migration to Tāloqān and adjoining areas plays an important role for income generation. Destinations like Dubai and Saudi Arabia are preferred and can only be afforded by males of wealthier families. The common route to these countries leads via Iran. As far as Saudi Arabia is concerned many people reportedly try to stay there after the pilgrimage (hajj). Pakistan, though relatively close in proximity ('old' trading and transporting routes lead to Chitral) has never been a favoured destination for labour migration since for once the language is an issue, secondly people in Pakistan are said to behave in an improper way towards Afghans. Therefore, short-term trading and smuggling are the only activities conducted in Pakistan for income generation.

Due to its geographical location (higher altitude) and natural environment (less arable land and, thus, not enough fodder to bring animals through the winter) Warsaj is far more vulnerable to population

<sup>22</sup> AKF built a school where also Pyu-kids go to.

<sup>23</sup> See more in detail on eshan in the 'General observations'-chapter.

<sup>24</sup> This is due to the activities of to Dr. Ahmad Mushāhed who linked them to universities at the time of his ambassadorship in Iran.

pressure and natural hazards like snow melts, land/mud slides etc. that occur regularly every spring at least. The coping strategy of people foresees that one male member of the family stays at home and all other males seek work outside the district, either in Iran or other areas of Afghanistan. People in Pyu, a settlement at the very far end of Qauwanduz valley, for example, harvest only enough for two months though the winter up there lasts around six months. They have 100-200 persons working in Iran, mostly in the region of Isfahan. Money is sent home via the hawala-system. Dependency on Iran is existential. Deh ta-ye Tāloqāndān, another far-off village of Miyanshahr has currently 180 people working in Iran, Yukhchish 120, Anuy 50-60% of its male community members. If they earn 2.000-3.000 USD a year they have enough to live from for several months in Afghanistan. After the money is spent they go again to Iran. Others are staying 3-4 years; as a rule two years' work in Iran provides the means for one year survival in Afghanistan.

‘agar Irān hast, mā zinda hastēm’  
=if there is Iran we are alive=

This extremely high dependency on remittances from Iran displays a high vulnerability towards changes in Iran’s immigration policy. The bulk of Afghans is working illegally in the neighboring country. Entering Iran and working unmolested has become more difficult during the last years since the police started persecuting illegal migrants more systematically. In several villages we met persons who had just returned from Iran involuntarily after they had been caught by the Iranian police and were sent back to Afghanistan. In case that they would somehow manage to escape expulsion, stay and get caught a second time they would be arrested.

**5.2 Institutions**

**5.2.1 Resources Management**

If the situation in Farkhār has been described as critical above, livelihood conditions in Warsaj are all the more in a troubling state of crisis if looked upon from a natural resources perspective. The district is characterized by a comparably rough terrain located in most parts at an altitude of above 2000 metres. The vulnerability of the population towards natural hazards like floods, snow masses, and land slides is extremely high. Pastures and the total area of arable land are in Warsaj even more limited than in Farkhār. At the same time excess population is still growing, putting ever more pressure on the scarce resources available.

Box 7: Land Cover in Warsaj District <sup>25</sup>

Rangeland	60%
Rain fed Crops	1%
Irrigated Land	6%
Fruit Trees	2%
Pistachio Trees	0%
Natural Forest	1%
Rock	11%
Permanent Snow	19%

Arable land

Natural conditions have it that the three hauza of Qauwanduz, Miyanshahr, and Khānaqā have no substantial rain-fed farming land, only Tarisht disposes of some larger ialmī plots. As a rule irrigated land plots are subdivided into very small allotments, often and especially on higher locations in terrace form.

<sup>25</sup> IDEAS Project proposal 2003, 9.

Informants in Pyu and Yukhchish/Qauwanduz stated to own on average 4-5 ser land<sup>26</sup> on which they grow rye, potatoes and wheat. People who own small landplots are busy with cultivation for 3-4 months, after that they have to leave their homes to go to Tāloqān or other cities for laboring since no income opportunities exist on both sides of the mountains near their homes. Apparently people who own animals are better off than those exclusively depending on crop cultivation.

From Heyut/Miyanshahr we heard that every one of the 120-130 households owns a garden plot, thus locals considered they have no landless as such. People of Rubata/Tarisht used to cultivate up on the hills before the drought years set in approximately 10 years ago. After the drought they did not restart cultivation for a long time, but then did again until an NGO started distributing wheat. This as well as the fact that plough oxen are very expensive (50.000 AFs) and have to be brought from Nuristan detained them to grow crops up the hills again. In other villages people also mentioned lacking precipitation that made cultivation and herding impossible in 2006.

In Rubata, Yawand-e Sēbdara, Enjin and Mulkuk (five communities towards the very end of Tarisht that share one FPM) the institution of a 'wheatkeeper' (nigahbān-e gandum) exists, whose task is to protect the wheat fields from animals at the time of plant growth and from birds close to harvest time. As salary the wheat keeper gets 1-2 ser of wheat from every landowner. Reportedly the wheat keeper is appointed each year anew for a whole year and also registered with the district administration.

#### Pastures and livestock

Pastures are government-owned and in people's view they – as local citizens – have the right to use the pastures.<sup>27</sup> In Tarisht valley animal husbandry constitutes the second important source of income besides labor migration. As stated above Tarisht is with its grazing areas and dry-farming lands the exception in Warsaj. The valleys of Qauwanduz and Miyanshahr do not dispose of comparable conditions for keeping lots of animals.

'kashā-ye ke haywanāt dārand, zindagī khub dārand'

=people who own animals have a good life=

People in Ashku/Tarisht reported to have plenty of pasture land up in the mountains; even people from neighbouring villages would send their herds up there. In the past the area was on a regular migration route of kuch̄. Still they are passing through today, but in less numbers. According to the local villagers they are not asking any kind of compensation or rent payments from the kuch̄ for using their pastures since there is supposed to be enough for all herders. During the same discussion somebody else mentioned that 'big' people would temporarily appropriate pasture land by force and that this cannot be prevented or changed because these people are commanders/arbābs (not necessary locals, but from Tāloqān) who 'have supporters' and nobody could say anything against them. In Rubata people reported they would take up their animals to the mountains from hamal (starting from 21 March) until mizān (ending 22 October). During that time almost nobody is in the village, people need to protect their cattle and goats from thieves who appear regularly each year from Ishkamish and Burka. Sometimes they steal as much as 50 cows from the Asmārī people. There is no such institution as a pasture guard.

Access rights to pastures are given to anybody with animals, be it kuch̄, locals from a settlement downhill or pastors from neighbouring village communities. This does not mean that the inhabitants of a village do not have 'their mountains' as one informant put it. So when it comes to wood collection or cutting and the trees are concerned people of one community have a clear conception of where their trees are and where the territory of another village begins, the inhabitants of which hold customary user rights for the trees in the proximity of their settlement. The principle of access rights to pastures for everybody is reportedly in accordance with shari'at law. The same informant who stressed this point qualified its validity with reference to recent population and herding size growth saying that villagers denied kuch̄ access to the pastures this year when they tried to take up their traditional migration

<sup>26</sup> Equivalent to 1-2,5 jerib.

<sup>27</sup> Everybody, no matter if the person belongs to a village nearby the pastures, has the right to use it for his animals. This rule is reportedly rooted in Islamic law/shari'at.

routes from before the revolution. In the past they had been regularly passing through on their way from Baghlān. When they appeared recently with 500 sheep and 50 camels, though they even had order/a letter from the head of state, the locals made them leave arguing that they have lost their user rights because they had gone to Pakistan at the time of fighting and not – like members of the local communities – defended the pastures. The kuchī reportedly left; it has not become clear if violence was involved in this conflict.

In Pyu/Qauwanduz villagers who own livestock take turns in taking them up to the pastures and guarding them against thievery and wolves etc. Households that own a lot of animals would move with their whole family to pasture/summer camps (ailāq). Kuchī do reportedly not pass through the area.

### Forest/wood

Due to severe environmental conditions with long and cold winters, fuel for heating and cooking is one of the most urgent needs of people in Warsaj and accordingly illegal cutting of trees and wood collection represents one of the main problems related to efforts of Natural Resource Management. In close proximity to villages and from what can be observed from the road there are no large amounts of forest or big trees left in the main valleys. Apparently, though, certain valleys behind the mountain ranges visible from the road still dispose of forest cover. People have to go far from their villages in order to get the wood. Informants from Rubata, for example, stated that while in close proximity to the village they only have small trees, there are seven metres high archa trees farther up some mountain valleys. They also claimed to actively undertake protection efforts for the younger trees saying they would not cut them and have a social control protection regime in place. The institution of a forest warden is quite new to the inhabitants of Rubata, it was only introduced four years ago, in other villages five and two years ago. Before wood cutting was punished by chance if officials happened to witness large-scale felling in this part of Tarisht. The institution of forest wardens existed formerly only in areas with pistachio forest cover, e.g. in Khānaqā, Farkhār etc. and has only recently – under the current government – been introduced to the district. Pistachio trees cannot be found in Warsaj because the climate is too cold.

Information regarding the forest warden – whether he is appointed by the government or the people of a community – are contradictory. In Yukhchish informants stated the forest guard was appointed by the government, people from the village cluster around Rubata reported to appoint the forest warden every year themselves. However, there was consensus that the function of the forest guard is limited to reporting wood theft and illegal cutting; he does not have enforcement power or fining capacity. His salary is not paid by the government but by local people who pay up to one ser wheat per household. The punishment for illegal cutting seems to be quite arbitrary dependent on circumstances and people involved. Given that the forest guard is paid by locals he is supposed to report on, it is obvious that he might decide to report some cases but not all and everybody's.

### Box 8: Illegal wood cutting and punishment

In one Tarisht village quite far from the district center one informant reported how he had been captured by a forest guard with dry wood he had collected up in the mountains. The procedure was that the next day an armed policeman brought a letter from the chief of police which stated he would have to come to the district center and pay a 10.000 AFs (200 USD) fine. Because the informant was in the middle of harvesting mungbeans when the policeman appeared he assured him that he would come the next day to the district center. The policeman asked 100 AFs for the favor of not taking him by force right away, he gave him 70, as much as he had at hand. When he went to the district center the next day and asked for being taken to prison because he could not pay the fine the wuluswāl helped him to get rid of the charges and sent him home again – most probably because the person was very old and called Sufi, thus respected and poor. Nevertheless one of the following days he received another letter – this time from the Department of Criminal Investigation – to pay the fine. On his way to the wuluswāl he met the chief of police in Khānaqā and complained to him about what he perceived as harassment. Thereupon the chief of police ripped the letter into pieces and sent the old man home.

In Heyut people said that in the past the hills surrounding the village had been covered with juniper trees up to the top. Three to seven years ago sporadic actions were undertaken to plant trees for future usage as firewood and construction material. Obviously no NGO or other outside force was involved in the decision to plant these trees along the lower rim of a hill and external finances were not needed either. Plantation occurred on privately owned land, the stream irrigating the trees was dug in a collective effort of 400 families from two villages. This was facilitated by elders from the main village who proposed the plan for tree planting to the neighbouring village, as a result of which both communities appointed a deputy each for overlooking the construction and plantation work.

## 5.2.2 Representation and Decision-making

The general patterns of representation and mechanisms of decision-making in Warsaj are not different from those in Farkhār, merely the actors influencing these processes are different ones.

As mentioned earlier Warsaj district is subdivided into four hauza, of these at least Tarisht is administratively further subdivided into four localized hauza or village clusters which have joint institutions like a wheat keeper, *mārāb*, forest warden and road keeper. All these positions are appointed annually and registered at the district government, but paid by the people. For example the five villages of Mulik, Yawand-e Sēbdara, Rubata, and Enjin make up one hauza; they share a roadkeeper who is paid one ser wheat, a forest guard who is paid up to one ser wheat and a wheatkeeper who also gets one ser of the wheat harvest from landowners.

Tarisht is dominating whole Warsaj in terms of representation, since all the more important actors originate from this valley. This can be interpreted as a legacy from the distant past since the people's *wakāl* has always been from Tarisht, actually always originating from the same family.

Warsaj is one of the first districts of Takhār where NSP-implementation will be almost finished at the end of 2006. By then every village or neighboring villages have selected CDC-members and applied for project funds. According to Concern's community mobilisers who are implementing the NSP locally, the programme has proven to have an integrative potential as it achieved the participation of all strata of rural dwellers. If in the beginning the more influential persons sometimes were skeptical about the programme, in the course of implementation they could be convinced of its advantages and then became engaged, e.g. as advisors to their respective CDC. On the other hand there have been cases of CDC-capture, where members were traditional power holders with influence who spent the money allocated for development projects for their own private purposes.

According to our empirical findings the success and outcome of the establishment of CDCs in Warsaj vary to a large extent. Some CDCs are merely new artificial bodies with all the traditional elders being 'elected' members with the most influential elder personifying the NSP-head. Others are artificial in a way that they are not making decisions but consult the elders who are not members. In few places, e.g. in Deh tah-ye Tāloqāndān, people claim that the NSP-shurā is the only institution in charge of decision-making nowadays.

In the case of Ashku/Tarisht people had a second NSP-shurā elected after the first was not able to bring electricity for three years. It remains unclear if the money was alienated for a private cause or lost to the deputies of the construction company. Rising dissatisfaction of villagers with the members of the first CDC built up tension so that the latter reportedly could not even dare to go to the mosque anymore without fearing to get attacked by their fellow villagers. In the end the chief of police administered to the problem by gathering the people and ordering them to appoint a new shurā.

The role of the mullah in decision-making is the same in Warsaj as in Farkhār: He can be a consultant of the elders, especially if legal questions are concerned and a final decision in accordance with shari'at law is necessary. As informants emphasized, according to shari'at all people would be treated the same, no matter if they are commanders or average peasants. Nevertheless it is not too far for people to imagine that a commander could bribe a mullah and thus shari'at would be interpreted more broadly to the advantage of the more powerful commander.

Most conflicts are related to land ownership and property rights. In such cases elders are often asked to mediate and come up with a solution. As a rule 'agreements' are the outcome of their efforts; that is a solution every conflicting party perceives to be justified and able to agree on. The solution does not have to be based on any kind of legal foundation, rather it has to make sense in the local context and consider the framework conditions. This holds for almost every kind of conflict, merely murder cases require the involvement of the government.

The government is perceived to be distant from local concerns and is on the one hand considered as something one has to beware of and one attempts to keep very far away from own matters. On the other hand there are certain expectations towards what the government should do. This contradiction concerning the relationship of local dwellers and the administrative structures cannot be fully explained with reason. While security is something people like to hold the government responsible for, they also tend to turn to the government for conflict settlement and appeals for assistance. As in the case of Pyu/Qauwanduz an unidentified sickness proliferated among the villagers with as many as 50-60 people affected at the time of field research. This caused them to appeal to the government by writing a letter to seek help from a governmental clinic. As a result a government official turned up to take blood tests to have them analyzed in Tāloqān.

The general statement that is repeated over and over when asked for government involvement at the local level is that the government did not assist people in anything in the past until these days. Now at least NGOs would engage in road and bridge building and also help families with wheat and oil rations in education for food programs, for example in Yukhchish/Tarisht.

### 5.3 Conflicts and Security

As mentioned in the previous paragraphs conflicts revolve mostly around land and pastures and - in addition to that - because of personal animosities among members of extended family networks.

It remained unclear if the most influential commander still has armed sub-commanders in Warsaj district as is suspected for Tāloqān and Farkhār. It is typical for Warsaj as well as Farkhār that the formerly important commanders are now in government positions in Kabul or at least Tāloqān. Thus, their direct influence is limited in a sense that they do not pay permanent attention to what is happening in their home district and do not necessarily generate income at the expense of locals. When they are asked for help though they take on the responsibility and engage in local matters. Their reputation and power is strong enough to enforce decisions or practices by order from the distance or during short visits to their home area.

#### Box 9: Road construction Rubata

In Rubata locals were busy building a road connecting the upper village downhill with the main road leading to the district centre. Workers at the construction site complained about the local commander of police who had apparently ordered the construction of this road, saying they could not object to it and now would have to keep on with construction during Ramazān until also the last part would be finished. The government-registered local road keeper was not involved in supervision of construction or even mobilization of workers since his task is limited to the main road connecting the district centre with the villages only. Thus, the NSP-chief who has been the most important elder before, mobilized laborers. Though the commander of police had promised explosives to burst large boulders and rocks people expect the explosives to arrive, at delivery charging somebody who will happen to be near the site and available and ripping him off the money. He will then be obliged to collect it from his fellow villagers. Interestingly, this road building is a striking example for local self-help capacities – though mobilized by force or at least with threat of force. In the end people admitted that the action is for their own well-being and that they disposed of the capacities to construct the road, but on their own would have never started to build it. After finishing the last metres cars will be able to enter the village for the first time ever, in cases of emergencies people could be brought to a hospital more easily.

## 6 Role of Women

Women are mainly engaged in household works inside their compounds, though getting water and collecting dung and wood from the mountains/pastures is also one of their daily tasks. As result of the decades-long violent conflict and recently high numbers of males migrating to Iran to seek jobs a considerable amount of households are headed by women today, especially in Farkhār. Here, according to our data, the cases where the male head of household is in Iran are far outnumbering the households headed by widows. Women households do not necessarily get support from their male relatives, thus they have to take over many of the tasks of their (former) husbands, including harvesting, bringing wood from far-away mountains, irrigating fields and trees etc. If work in a village has to be done jointly by all households, woman households in general hire somebody to do it for them if the work can not be done by the women jointly with the men. In one village, five women contributed their share to canal digging during the night since they could not afford it to hire someone. If the family whose male members are away owns land, this will be rented out in most cases: common share-cropping arrangements include *seyak/sebakhsh* where the landowner receives one third of the harvest, the person cultivating the land gets the other two thirds, and *chārak* (owner gets a fourth).

Works that are done by men and women jointly include preparing the roofs/making them waterproof for the winter and harvesting. Inheritance customs foresee the division of the land after a father's death among his sons. Officially and also according to *shari'at* (Islamic law) daughters (in theory) get fifty percent of what their brothers would receive. If a father for example has two sons and one daughter and owned five *jerib* of land, both sons will get two *jerib* and the daughter one *jerib*. This rule is not being practiced in Farkhār and Warsaj as the daughters would usually abstain from their right of inheritance. If a landowning woman dies her land will be inherited by her children, for the case that she passes away without any descendants the land will be allocated to her family, not her husband.

In terms of participation in decision-making processes women have their own ways of communicating their ideas to their husbands and into a *shurā*. Though officially every CDC has also four female members this is true only on paper. In reality women never take part in any meeting jointly with men. This does not mean they are purposefully excluded by men but rather that the process of informing men about their views on issues to be debated by the *shurā* is already completed. One exception from this is Yasken village in Warsaj with a woman, a widow, heading the NSP-*shurā*. Because women are constrained for leaving their homes they are usually 'elected' into the NSP-council as plain members. As such they do not have to fulfil tasks that include possibly going to the town or engaging with outsiders in any other way. Women do not perceive their situation as unjust or unfair. If necessity arises – like for example that a woman is head of a household or, as was the case in the past under the Taliban when women had to walk from Farkhār to the bazaar in Tāloqān and back in order to get oil and food stuffs because it was too dangerous for men, women are capable of bearing large responsibilities.

'dar in mulk-e sang-u-khāra hēchēzē dēgar nadārad; az ami chārasāzi  
nakunī chāra kai mēsha? chāra az kujā paydā mēsha?'

=in this mountainous and rough place there is nothing; if you don't earn money with  
whatever means  
at your disposal (by giving away daughters)... how can you make a living?=-

Furthermore, female informants stated that they have a bigger say nowadays in decisions affecting the household, e.g. regarding marriage arrangements. As poverty is rampant in many villages in Farkhār and Warsaj district, the marrying off of daughters is traditionally one additional source of income for a family. Brides have become very expensive during the last years inducing a vicious circle: young men cannot afford to engage or marry; often they have to work in Iran for many years until they have earned enough money to finance a wedding. By that time the groom as well as the bride can be comparatively old already. Taking a second or third wife becomes even more difficult and rather represents an exception. Labour migration to Iran is to a large scale driven by the desire to earn money for marrying. In quite a lot of cases we heard that men brought wives from Iran back to their villages. In many cases these women work as teachers or in NGOs.

## 7 Conclusion

An important structural constraint influencing governance processes in both, Farkhār and Warsaj districts, is displayed by existing and ever-growing population pressure that currently finds an exit valve in large-scale illegal work migration flows to Iran. This situation of men of all ages leaving the two districts for a foreign country and re-entering the local scene after a while influences local governance patterns.

On the one hand the absence of 50%-60% of all male inhabitants of the districts' communities puts under question the legitimacy and validity of current decision-making structures, existing power relationships and established institutions like NSP-councils etc. On the other hand it is crucial to beware of potentially shifting power relations after the return of labour migrants to their home communities.

Moreover our research shows that there are local institutional arrangements in place that address questions of access and distribution of natural resources, what often is neglected by development agencies. Socio-economic conditions are harsh but nevertheless the majority of the people think that their lives improved in the past decades due to income generation possibilities in Iran. This is taking the pressure out of local economic contexts and enables many families' survival. The experience of living in a foreign country is also providing know-how and makes people more amenable for new ideas, especially if these could help to manage scarce resource bases which they are dependent upon in very practical terms, e.g. for fuelwood.

### 7.1 Institutional Settings in Farkhār and Warsaj

In the case of CDCs, which were recently established in the course of implementation of the NSP, our empirical findings point out two tendencies that lead to the same conclusion: First, in most cases CDCs seem to be perceived just as a new label for another body that is superimposed and needs to be accepted by local communities in order to access economic resources. Thus, traditional power holders, who are often elders and/or commanders are the deputies 'elected' into the CDCs. Second, in slight variation, the NSP-shurā is assembled with less important people. In these cases they always consult the elders' council and do not take any decisions on their own. As one elder put it, 'We are their directors'. This leads to the conclusion that so far the NSP-council is not perceived as legitimate local governance institution and inhibits no prospects for transforming local decision-making processes as foreseen according to NSP goals. What can be observed is either a capture of new bodies by traditional power structures or the insignificance of newly imposed institutions by existing concomitant traditional ones that have proved to be expedient.

The institutions summarized in figure 1, page 8, hint at the fact that there is indeed a wide variety of institutional arrangements at hand which regulate the satisfaction of daily requirements in community life. This furthermore suggests that there is an underestimated capacity for self-assistance and regulation inside local communities as Figure 2 demonstrates for Mashtān (Farkhār).



### Box 10: Communities' own capacities analysis – example of road repair in Mashtān

The communities belonging to the village clusters of Mashtān are located far from the main road between Farkhār town and Khonakhā, the administrative centre of Warsaj district. After the snowmelt had caused heavy damages to the road it became impossible to travel on it and as a result three persons who could not be brought to the hospital/doctor on time died on the way. This made elders of the five communities take action after NGOs and deputies of the provincial Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD)-line ministry had not signalled readiness to take action or provided any kind of assistance. At the time of field research 20-40 men from every of the five villages had been working on the road for about six months. They had started in spring, taken a break for harvest time, and continued afterwards, constructing first a path for donkeys, then repairing the road for cars and finally widening the road. In organizational terms every village selected two deputies ('road keeper') to collect the workers for construction works, to supervise the building process and the division of labourers, to obtain material for the workers (shovels, other tools), and organize the rotation for food provision and preparation by households.<sup>28</sup> Every village sends the same amount of labourers to work on sub-divided sections. To determine which village has to construct which part of the road, lots were cast. Everybody who attends prayers at the mosque has to work at the roadside seven days in a row; households that are not headed by a male are freed of labour contribution. Two donors contributed 1000 USD each for buying equipment for the workers, one an absentee person, who is originally from the same mantiqa, but already for 24 years living in Saudi Arabia. The second backer was a rich trader who also ran for parliamentary elections.

These rudiments of regulatory capacity are opposed by a situation of dramatic natural resource depletion. The existence of scarce acreages for cultivation combined with ever-growing amounts of people inhabiting the valleys caused dry-land cultivation up to the very tops of hills, extensive grazing and timber harvesting for firewood and construction material. The result was large-scale deforestation. Initial efforts by the governments of Zaher Shah (1933-1973) and Dāud (1973-1978) to establish some kind of natural resources management practices and respective bodies at the local level were reversed during the past decades of turmoil and fighting.

## 7.2 Natural Resource Management

'hukumat nabud jangalrā har kas ba naf'-e khud istefāda mākard'  
=when there was no government everybody used the forest for his own benefit=

Even if today people concede the renewed existence of a government, corruption is being perceived as a major impediment for sustainable natural resources management and effective enforcement capacities of official NRM agencies. Adding to this is a significant lack of knowledge about how to manage use and access of degrading natural resources in the current state of crisis. For the bulk of the population the connections of deforestation and increasing mud-slides, snow-melt damages etc. are not clear at all. Possible presentiments are blighted by everyday needs for survival. There is no informed commonsense about basic coherences of the natural surroundings and increasing livelihood hardships among rural dwellers in Farkhār and Warsaj.

Current ownership and access patterns of land and trees, for example, imply ill-fated incentives. If land can be privately owned or at least seized with individual user rights for dry-land cultivation or collectively accessed as grazing land, trees are always government property, their fruits (e.g. pistachio nuts) can be used by everyone though. This implies that no person has an interest in planting trees

<sup>28</sup> Reportedly every night one sheep is killed for feeding the workers; by the time of field research they had slaughtered already more than 50 sheep.

himself on land that he has no documents for, because this would just diminish the space for dry-land cultivation or grazing of animals. The tree itself would be classified state-property, the prospective fruits subject to harvesting by every community member.

The natural environmental constraints present in Farkhār and Warsaj districts in combination with ever-growing numbers of population find its expressions in specific land-use and share-cropping agreements, accelerated natural resources depletion as well as increasing migration flows to Iran and other provinces of Afghanistan. The share of landless is constantly increasing, there are only very few big landowners, leasehold (*ijāra*) is of minor importance compared to land plot mortgage arrangements (*gerau*). The latter is being used by landowning individuals to obtain short-term cash by mortgaging out their land plots. They use the money to cover travel and organizational expenses, (paying smugglers, buying passports with visa and short-term work permits) to go to Iran. Acknowledging reported numbers of 50%-60% of the total male population to work illegally in Iran, the high degree of dependency on remittances becomes clear. A change of Iranian immigration policy as is underway right now<sup>29</sup> will have a significant impact on livelihoods and the overall economic situation in Farkhār and Warsaj. At the same time the experience of working and surviving in a foreign country bears implications for long-term features of local governance structures. As a rule, power relations shift in response to returnees' finally settling down in the communities, because due to their experience and gained knowledge abroad they are often consulted by official power holders in their respective home communities.

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<sup>29</sup> See RFE/RL 2006.

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