

DFID

**Government of
Afghanistan**

FAO

**DEVELOPMENT OF
SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL LIVELIHOODS
IN THE EASTERN HAZARAJAT
(SALEH)**

GCP/AFG/029/UK

MID-TERM REVIEW REPORT

DRAFT



FAO Afghanistan

Kabul, 23 September 2006

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

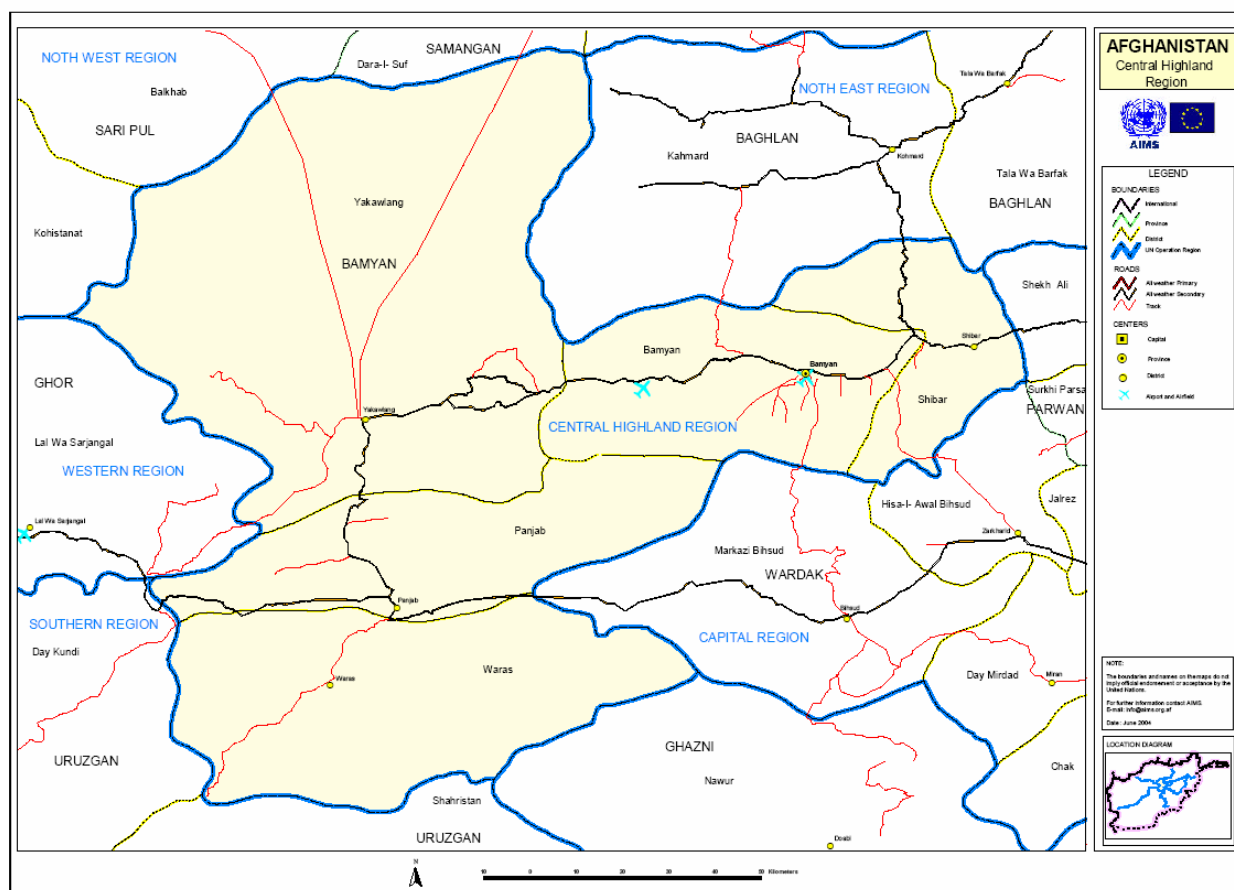
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
1.1. Summary of recommendations	7
1.1.1. Recommendations to be acted upon primarily by DFID	7
1.1.2. Recommendations to be acted upon primarily by FAO and GOA	8
1.1.3. Recommendations to be acted upon primarily by the project	8
2. INTRODUCTION.....	11
3. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT	12
4. PROJECT OBJECTIVE AND DESIGN	13
4.1. Project objective, design and approach	13
4.2. Relevance to development priorities and policies	14
4.2.1. Relevance to MAAHF Master Plan	14
4.2.2. Relevance to FAO priorities.....	15
4.2.3. Relevance to DFID priorities.....	15
4.3. Adjustment of Logical Framework Approach matrix	15
5. IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT	16
5.1. Project budget and expenditure	16
5.2. Activities and outputs	16
5.2.1. Component 1. Capacity development for community level action to improve agricultural livelihoods and resources management.....	17
5.2.2. Component 2. Improved food security income generation and employment opportunities, and resource utilisation, through community-based action.....	20
5.2.3. Component 3. A framework for dissemination and replication of lessons in improving agricultural livelihoods and natural resource management, linked to provincial and district planning.....	29
5.3. Backstopping and external consultancies	30
5.3.1. FAO Regional Office backstopping	30
5.3.2. External consultancies.....	30
5.4. Need for micro-credit system	32
5.5. Poppy cultivation	33
5.6. Geographical coverage	33
5.7. Project management.....	33
5.8. Coordination.....	34
5.9. Project work plan	35
5.10. No-cost extension of pilot period.....	35
5.11. Scope for a second phase of the project.....	35
6. ACHIEVEMENTS.....	36
6.1. Effects and impacts	36
6.2. Sustainability.....	36
6.3. Gender and development.....	37
6.4. Environmental impacts	37
7. CONCLUSIONS.....	37

ANNEXES

1. Terms of references for the Mid-Term Review
2. Itinerary of the Mid-Term Review mission
3. List of persons met
4. List of documents
5. Revised overall LAF matrix
6. Revised objectively verifiable indicators with justification
7. Revised specific indicators for monitoring, review, and impact
8. List of project activities
9. List of NGO implementing partners and letters of agreement
10. List of FAO backstopping missions to the SALEH Project
11. List of external consultancy visits to the SALEH Project
12. List of SALEH project staff



Map of project area

ABBREVIATIONS

AKDN	Aga Khan Development Network
CAP	Community Action Plans
CAPDP	Community Action Plan Development Process
CBM&E	Community-Based Monitoring and Evaluation
CDC	Community Development Council
CLO	Community Liaison Officers
DAAHF	Department of Agricultural Animal Husbandry and Food
DFID	Department for International Development
EIRP	Emergency Irrigation Rehabilitation Programme
FAO	Food & Agriculture Organisation of United Nations
FBO	Farmer-Based Organisation
FFS	Farmer's Field Schools
GAIN	Greening Afghanistan Initiative
GO	Government Organisation
GOA	Government of Afghanistan
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
ISO	Intermediary Service Organisation
LFA	Logical Framework Approach
MAAHF	Ministry of Agricultural Animal Husbandry and Food
MISFA	Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NEEP	National Emergency Employment Programme
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NRI	Natural Resource Institute
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
NZAID	New Zealand International Aid and Development Agency
PDP	Project Discussion Papers
PRA	Participatory Rural Analysis
PTN	Project Technical Notes
RAMP	Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Programme
SALEH	Development of Sustainable Agricultural Livelihoods in Eastern Hazarajat
TOR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
WEP	Women's Empowerment Project
VFU	Veterinary Field Unit

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

<i>jerib</i>	land measure, 1/5 of a hectare
<i>kuchi</i>	pastoral nomad
<i>lalmi</i>	dry-land farming
<i>mirab</i>	water master
<i>shura</i>	traditional council

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The MTR team would like to express its thanks to all officials and individuals met in the Government of Afghanistan, DFID, FAO, and the project offices, for the kind support and valuable information which the MTR team received during its work in Afghanistan and which highly facilitate the work. A special thanks to Chief Technical Adviser, Karim Merchant, and the rest of the project team for logistical support, qualified guidance, and pleasant company during field visits.

This report contains the views of the MTR team, which do not necessarily correspond to the views of the Government of Afghanistan, DFID, or FAO. All proposals and recommendations are subject to approval by the concerned parties.



Photo 1 Valley in Yakawlang district

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The project Development of Sustainable Agricultural Livelihoods in Eastern Hazarajat (SALEH) commenced in June 2003 as a four-year project funded by DFID with a budget of USD 5,992,654 and implemented by FAO in partnership with Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry and Food (MAAHF) of the Government of Afghanistan (GOA) and local non-government organisations (NGOs). The project seeks to enhance livelihoods in the Hazarajat through implementation of activities in support of (a) strengthening the capacities of local farmer based organisations (FBOs) and intermediary service providers (government, NGO, private sector); (b) piloting of actions to improve livelihoods (common property management, farming systems improvement, non-farm activities, small infrastructure works); and (c) support for information exchange and up-scaling.

The Project Document stipulated a tripartite mid-term review (MTR) after two years of implementation, but restrictions due to security problems caused the review to be postponed till June-July 2006. The joint GOA-DFID-FAO MTR team consisted of (a) Mr Gorm Pedersen, Socio-economist, FAO consultant (team leader); (b) Mr Mohammad Omar Omar Agronomist, Director of Board of Specialists, MAAHF; and (c) Mr Anthony Fitzherbert, Agriculture and Rural Development specialist, DFID consultant.

In line with experience from many community development projects implemented by NGOs, the project strongly emphasis a bottom-up approach and underlines the importance of community management and ownership of interventions. The main focus is on formation and running of FBOs as local institutions serving as pivot for all activities. Following a three-stage community action plan development process (CAPDP), each FBO decides on a community action plan (CAP) prioritising the needs of the community, as they perceive them, and these CAPs then become the starting point for project interventions. As the last step in the CAPDP, community based monitoring and evaluation cells (CBM&E) are established from among members of the community who are selected for the purpose of overseeing the quality of the work being jointly undertaken by the community with assistance from the SALEH project.

With a strong emphasis on community decision making and ownership of activities, the project is testing approaches to the development of rural communities, not usually applied by FAO in Afghanistan, but with a success (so far) that merits further analysis with the view to replicating the approach in other interventions by FAO and others.

The pace of rural development in a remote and mountainous region such as the Hazarajat is slow. Furthermore, results of a project of SALEH's nature, with emphasis on being an innovative pilot project and on the development of community capacity and community ownership of activities, do not come quickly. In spite of that, and delays due to staff recruitment problems and security lockdowns, the project has now established 68 FBOs and 56 CBM&E cells in the four districts in Bamyan province covered by the project (Shibar, Yakawlang, Panjab and Waras), and all FBOs have developed community action plans (CAPs). This is considered close to the maximum that can be handled with the given resources and it is therefore recommended that no further substantial expansion, geographically or in terms of number of FBOs, takes place in the present pilot project phase of the project.

Implemented by either SALEH's own staff or by contracted local NGOs, a number of technical interventions have also been started with the FBOs and in response to the FBO CAPs. These include training and capacity building, wheat seed multiplication and demonstrations, bean demonstrations, vegetable nurseries, fruit tree nurseries, poplar nurseries, fruit tree model orchards, poultry and bee keeping. The project has also

undertaken rehabilitation of infrastructure such as irrigation canals, intakes, culverts, and water reservoirs.

The type and volume of activities appear acceptable under the circumstances, but it remains a problem that many of the interventions (typically the fruit tree nurseries and model orchards) will not show tangible results until the very end of the present project period. It may therefore be difficult to gain the necessary experience and analyse the results of some interventions within the lifetime of the project as currently defined. However, if a no-cost extension of 18 months, as recommended in this report, is approved, almost two years remain of this phase of the project, and this should give time for the project to consolidate its achievements to date and build on the foundations laid in a sustainable fashion, with its existing resources and provided there is no significant geographical expansion.

A no-cost extension of the project is possible due to budget savings. Due to the slow upstart of activities, spending was below budget for the first year and a half. Since then, spending has been close to expectations. As of June 2006, there remains an unspent balance of around USD 3.1 million. With expected expenses amounting to around USD 1.2 million for the remaining 11 months of the project, there will, by June 2007, be an unspent balance of about USD 1.8-1.9 million. It is recommended that this amount be used to fund a no-cost extension of the pilot project phase of 18 months.

Although it is too early in the projects active life to make any final assessments, it should not be overlooked that this is essentially a pilot project from which lessons must be learned and experiences recorded and analysed and if possible and appropriate expanded both within the Hazarajat and beyond. Project management is in the process of actively setting up an information system to support this critical analysis of project achievements.

As with any project that is actively involved, the SALEH project will constantly require fine-tuning and improvements both in management and in its technical content and application. At this stage the project appears to be on the right tracks and pointing in the right direction. The MTR team, therefore, does not see any need for overall changes in the project concept at this stage. Changes may be considered for a possible second phase, developed and expanded on the experience gained during the present project.

1.1. Summary of recommendations

In order to provide an easy overview and checklist for follow-up, the following summary contains all recommendation made in this report. The recommendations are organised according to main responsibility for follow-up and type. The organisational and technical contexts of the recommendations are not provided here but will have to be read in the relevant sections of this report.

1.1.1. Recommendations to be acted upon primarily by DFID

1. Provided there is no further substantial expansion, geographically or in terms of number of FBOs, the present pilot project phase should be extended on a no-cost basis by an additional eighteen months until the end of 2008. This will fit in with the agricultural seasons and allow the project to include the harvest season September-October 2008, when important lessons may be learned.
2. In connection with a possible no-cost extension of the project, the donor should continue its flexible administration of the grant and allow the project to reallocate funds between budget lines in order to set up a workable budget.

1.1.2. Recommendations to be acted upon primarily by FAO and GOA

3. Given the novelty of the SALEH project approach, and in line with its pilot status, and the prospect of achieving interesting results in rural community and agricultural development worthy of further dissemination, a study of experiences and lessons learned should be undertaken by the appropriate department(s) of the FAO headquarters in Rome in collaboration with the GOA. An appropriate timing for this could be some time in the middle of the proposed no-cost extension period 2007-2008.
4. Serious consideration should be given to following up the present pilot project with a second phase of four to five years in which the role of the government would continue to be strengthened. If such a second phase is agreed and donor(s) found to support the idea, activities should be scaled up and the geographical coverage expanded to include districts with substantial Hazara population not covered in the first phase (e.g. Bamyan Centre and districts in neighbouring Ghor and Wardak province) as suggested in the original Project Document. In this connection, it should also be considered to establish a second project office in, for instance, Panjab to facilitate communication and more easy access to new areas south of the Koh-e-Babar range.
5. Should a second phase of the project be approved and funded, the further development of project concepts, particularly related to the role of the FBOs, should be considered, promoting the development towards more formalised institutions at community level. This should be closely related to the experience gained from the NSP concerning the establishment of formalised and sustainable institutions at community level.
6. In connection with a possible second phase of the project in which the role of the government will continue to be strengthened, it should be considered (in the Hazarajat) to coordinate more activities under the umbrella of SALEH so that it may change its status from being a project to becoming a programme.

1.1.3. Recommendations to be acted upon primarily by the project

Recommendations requiring early action

7. A third level of the LFA matrix should be developed by the project to cater for the need for detailed indicators referring to specific activities or types of activities developed as a result of the community action plans (CAPs) of the farmer-based organisations (FBOs) and detailed in the letters of agreements made with implementing partners.
8. There is a considerable demand from the FBOs that the literacy and agricultural training programme be expanded and strengthened to include vocational training. Within its funding and manpower capacity, the project should respond positively to this demand. This will also fit in very well with the proposed NZAID-funded Women's Empowerment Project (WEP). No doubt, successful vocational training will lead to additional demands for developing market outlets and linkages.
9. The project needs to analyse the reasons why former NGO initiatives in vegetable production do not appear to have had a lasting impact. Note is, however, taken of the fact that vegetable cultivation where it is being supported by the project is at the direct request of the FBO CAP and therefore has a greater likelihood of being accepted.
10. While the SALEH project is excluded by its mandate from establishing its own micro-finance services, it must continue to pursue the issue with MISFA and other organisations to encourage them to establish micro-finance services in the project areas to cater for the needs of poor farmers.
11. The project should consider the need to fill vacancies during the time remaining to the project. Some of these vacancies may be filled on a short-term basis, only.

Recommendations on general issues

12. The SALEH project is already working in close collaboration with the local departments of agriculture in Bamyan province and the MAAHF was an integral part of this MTR, but nonetheless project management must ensure that the experiences, lessons learned and successes achieved by the project in the course of its various activities should be fed up to the relevant departments in the MAAHF in Kabul.
13. No geographical expansion should take place within the life of this pilot project. The project should consolidate work with the existing 68 FBOs and only allow for limited expansion to neighbouring communities on unsolicited requests – maybe to the level of around 75 FBOs. Such an expansion will require fewer resources from the project because farmer-to-farmer exchange is already taking place.
14. The project should consider fielding a consultant experienced in the cropping systems and use of natural and cultivated plants to make a study of this subject preferably with a Central Asian/Near East highland experience. The SALEH project provides an ideal platform in which to base such a study in dialogue with established FBOs.
15. Although it is not envisaged that the SALEH project should assume responsibility for veterinary matters in the Hazarajat, as this is outside its TOR, the project should, however, endeavour to help establish linkages between the FBOs and whatever livestock health programmes are being managed or are developed in the region. However, the project might consider acquiring technical capacity on issues relating to livestock husbandry and nutrition. These issues are already included in the project's farmer and extension training / literacy programme.
16. The project should consider engaging a consultant specialist in pasture and rangeland management, experienced in the pastoral management customs, issues, ecologies and botany of highland Central Asia and the Near East of which Afghanistan is a part (e.g. Turkey, Iran, and Central Asia), to study the situation and develop a set of recommendations for meaningful and practical interventions.
17. Close collaboration should be maintained between the SALEH project and next phase of the FAO poultry project after the new USAID funding comes on stream.
18. To meet the justifiable priorities of FOB CAPs, close collaboration should be maintained between the SALEH project and the major infrastructure programmes whether focused on irrigation and water issues, roads or other forms of infrastructure, whether they be under National Priority Programmes such as NSP, NEEP, NADP etc or others funded under WB, USAID or other bilateral donors.
19. Results and lessons learned through the SALEH project should be disseminated through a series of workshops at national level once the time is appropriate, possibly during the last six months of the present phase.

Recommendations on technical issues

20. The project should continue to support the dissemination of tested improved varieties of wheat and other cereals and farmer seed production through the FBOs in close collaboration with the FAO seed programme (GCP/AFG/018/EC - in its final phase and the new programme GCP/AFG/045/EC expected to start in October 2005). This is essential to ensure that existing FBOs continue to receive regular inputs of small quantities of the latest appropriate varieties for multiplication by key farmers, technically supervised jointly by the district departments of agriculture and the SALEH technical staff.
21. The project must continue to pay close attention to introducing improvements in cultural practice, potato seed production and introduction of high yielding varieties, taking due account of local preference in potato types and market demand. Close collaboration

should be maintained with the new FAO seed programme in Bamyan under GCP/AFG/045/EC expected to start in October 2006 for five years, which will have a potato component.

22. In view of the significance of post harvest potato losses whilst in store, particular attention must be paid to the introduction of improved storage designs that are within the capacity of village communities to construct with their own labour. The project should establish demonstrations to illustrate the benefit of improved storage designs for further expansion with those FBOs who show an interest in this matter. A number of storage models already exist in the area, introduced by various organisations, for assessment and consideration.
23. In view of the importance of potatoes as one of the very few cash crops produced in certain districts of Bamyan province, the project should pay particular attention to assisting FBOs establish or improve market linkages for this crop.
24. The project should address the need for forward planning and expansion of fruit tree nurseries to accommodate a three to four year cycle of production. The fruit tree nursery activity will require close technical supervision through all its stages of development up to the end of the project. In view of the altitude and the incidence of late frost in many locations, care needs to be taken in the selection of the varieties of fruit for budding. It is known that apples do well in most of the villages where the nurseries have been established, it is less certain how almonds and apricots will perform in some locations. With respect to the apples, it is recommended that the project should consider procuring appropriate semi-dwarfing rootstocks (such as MM106) for local vegetative (layering) propagation rather than relying on seedling rootstocks. Experience elsewhere in Afghanistan has shown that there is no need for such work to be confined to government managed nurseries. If properly trained the techniques required for propagating 'Malling' rootstocks are well within the technical capacity of private nurserymen such as those being trained within the SALEH project as part of the FBOs.
25. To follow up on a good start, the project has to provide close technical supervision of the model orchards until the end of the project through the various stages of the orchards' maturity.
26. To follow up on a good start and important interest already generated, the project has to provide close technical supervision of the poplar woodlots until the end of the present project.
27. The project should take care that technical training in agriculture should not be provided in a void but should be combined wherever possible with practical application in order to reinforce the messages provided.
28. In such situations where household food security and nutrition is the priority, rather than commercial vegetable production, only seed of open pollinated varieties of vegetable must be introduced (rather than hybrid seed). Wherever possible, emphasis should be placed on farmer / household based seed production in the interests of sustainability.
29. Bee keeping appears to be a successful project based on precedents elsewhere in Afghanistan and certainly should be continued. Any technical assessment would require a specialist in this subject to review this activity.

2. INTRODUCTION

The project Development of Sustainable Agricultural Livelihoods in Eastern Hazarajat (SALEH) commenced in June 2003 as a four-year project. Funded by DFID, the project is implemented by FAO in partnership with Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry and Food (MAAHF) of the Government of Afghanistan (GOA) and local non-government organisations (NGOs).

The Project Document stipulated a tripartite mid-term review (MTR) after about two years of implementation. Thus, ideally, the MTR should have taken place during 2005, but restrictions due to security problems in relation to preparations for and conducting of the parliamentary elections caused the review to be postponed till mid-2006.

As per the terms of reference (TOR) for the MTR, the purpose of the exercise is to review and assess the current project status, in particular the extent to which the project inputs so far have contributed towards the expected outputs and whether the outputs are likely to achieve the intended outcomes or purpose of the project. Based on the findings and the current country context, the review shall make recommendations for any necessary changes in the overall design and orientation of the project and make recommendations on the work plan for the remainder of the project. The TOR also states that the MTR will deal with the issues recommended by the tripartite meeting held 12 November 2005. These issues are: (a) design requirement for a possible second phase of the project, and (b) the issue of a no-cost extension. (See Annex 1 for the full TOR for the Mid-Term Review.)

GOA, DFID and FAO fielded the joint MTR mission in June-July 2006 with the following participants: Mr Gorm Pedersen, Socio-economist, FAO consultant (team leader); Mr Mohammad Omar Omar, Agronomist, Director of Board of Specialists, MAAHF; and Mr Anthony Fitzherbert, Agriculture and Rural Development specialist, DFID consultant.

The itinerary of the MTR mission is provided in Annex 2; a list of persons met in Annex 3; and a list of documents consulted in Annex 4.

The MTR team applied a mix of methodologies in carrying out the review, the main components being: (a) document studies; (b) interviews with key government, donor, and FAO officials; (c) discussion meetings and interviews with project staff; (d) observation visits to project communities and to specific project activity sites; (e) discussion meetings and interviews with beneficiary groups and individuals. The TOR stipulated a participatory workshop to be held with key partners for reviewing the project's output and implementation approach. Unfortunately, absence of some of the key partners and time constraint prevented this from happening; instead, two sessions on the issue were held with project staff in Bamyán and the issue was discussed with other partners separately as and when possible.

The MTR team held a debriefing meeting on 19 July at the FAO Representation Office in Kabul with FAO Representative, Mr Serge Verniau; FAO Senior Project Operations Officer, Mr Prem N. Sharma; Director of Foreign Relations Department (MAAHF), Mr Zaher Moher; and the CTA and National Project Officer of SALEH. For this purpose, a debriefing note was presented summarising the main findings and recommendations of the MTR team. The debriefing note was subsequently merged into the present main report.

This report follows a format primarily based on the contents of the Terms of Reference for the MTR and with due consideration of the general requirements for FAO review reports.

3. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The SALEH project seeks to enhance livelihoods in the relatively isolated mountainous province of Bamyan in the central highlands of Afghanistan. At the time when the original SALEH project concept was developed in 2002, during the first year of the 'new order' following the fall of the Taliban, Bamyan province was highlighted as one of ten geographical locations and regions requiring special assistance. This was due to its natural poverty and remoteness, and the depredations suffered both during the Soviet occupation and during the years of Taliban ascendancy. The area is still among the least developed in the country and still suffers from a number of constraints to development, including under-resourced government and private sector service systems at all levels.

The project addresses the problems by (a) strengthening the capacities of local FBOs and intermediary service providers (ISOs – government, NGO, private sector); (b) piloting of actions to improve livelihoods (common property management, farming systems improvement, non-farm activities, small infrastructure works); and (c) support for information exchange and up-scaling.

Implementation of the project is done by FAO in partnership with Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry and Food (MAAHF) of the Government of Afghanistan (GOA) and local non-government organisations (NGOs). Specific activities are carried out partly by SALEH's own staff and partly by a number of local NGO implementing partners.

The project works in close coordination and cooperation with other FAO programmes such as the seed programme (GCP/AFG/018/EC), the nutrition project (GCP/AFG/039/GER), the irrigation programme (GCP/AFG/035/AFG), and the poultry project (GCP/AFG/030/USA). Affective coordination and cooperation also takes place with Department of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry and Food (DAAHF, the MAAHF's presence at provincial and district level) as well as with other agencies in the area, such as NGOs. In addition, the project is instrumental in provincial coordination meetings and sectoral working group meetings.

The project operates within the framework of two major National Development Programmes of GOA: (a) Livelihoods and Social Protection (LSP) and (b) Natural Resource Management (NRM). In addition, it is also in line with the main pillars of the five-year MAAHF Master Plan approved in January 2006. In addition, SALEH may be seen as a supplement to the government's National Solidarity Programme (NSP) and visa versa. NSP was conceived after the start of SALEH and operates so far only in some of the SALEH project areas.

The project commenced on 12 June 2003 and will, in its present form, run for a four-year period until 12 June 2007. The budget of USD 5,992,654 is funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom.

The SALEH project originally intended to address problems in all central highland districts with a majority of Hazara population. However, a slow upstart due to problems in recruiting staff and security issues has meant that the project today operates only in four districts (see table below).

Provinces	Planned districts	Actual districts
Bamyan	Bamyan Centre, Shibar, Yakawlang, Panjab and Waras	Shibar, Yakawlang, Panjab and Waras
Wardak	Hisa-i-Awali Bihsud (Bihsud 1) and Markazi Bihsud (Bihsud 2)	
Ghor	Lal wa Sarjantal	

4. PROJECT OBJECTIVE AND DESIGN

4.1. Project objective, design and approach

The SALEH project development objective, purpose, and main components are as follows:

<i>Development objective:</i>	To improve the livelihoods and well being of the people of the Eastern Hazarajat on a sustainable basis
<i>Purpose:</i>	Capacity opportunities and mechanisms developed for the rural population of Eastern Hazarajat to achieve sustainable improvements in livelihoods
<i>Component 1:</i>	Capacity developed for community level action to improve agricultural livelihoods and resources management
<i>Component 2:</i>	Improved food security, income generation and employment opportunities, and resources management
<i>Component 3:</i>	Promote and support planning, information dissemination and replication of lessons for improving agricultural livelihoods and natural resources management, focussed initially at the provincial and district levels

The project seeks to enhance livelihoods in the Hazarajat through implementation of activities in support of (a) strengthening the capacities of FBOs and intermediary service providers (ISOs – government, NGO, private sector); (b) piloting of actions to improve livelihoods (common property management, farming systems improvement, non-farm activities, small infrastructure works); and (c) information exchange and up-scaling.

In line with experience from many community development projects implemented by NGOs, the project strongly emphasizes a bottom-up approach and underlines the importance of community management and ownership of interventions. The main focus is on formation and running of FBOs as local institutions serving as pivot for all activities. Following a three-stage community action plan development process (CAPDP), each FBO decides on a community action plan (CAP) prioritising the needs of the community, as they perceive them, and these CAPs then become the starting point for project interventions. The last step in the CAPDP also stipulates establishing of community based monitoring and evaluation cells (CBM&E) from among members of the community who are selected for the purpose of overseeing the quality of the work being jointly undertaken by the community with assistance from the SALEH project.

The project was furthermore designed with a strong action-research focus on building the capacity of community level institutions, government organisations (GOs), international non-government organisations (INGOs), national non-government organisations (NGOs), and the nascent private sector. The lessons learned and the processes would then provide a platform to replicate and upscale this field-tested knowledge, thereby influencing national policy and helping to bridge the 'practice /policy' divide.

With a strong emphasis on community decision making and ownership of activities, the project is testing approaches to the development of rural communities, not usually applied by FAO in Afghanistan, but with a success (so far) that merits further analysis with the view to replicating the approach in other interventions by FAO and others.

The MTR team does not see any need for overall changes in the project concept at this stage. Changes may be considered for a possible second phase, developed and expanded on the experience gained during the present project (see section 5.11).

The project is not prescriptive but inductive and activities and targets develop out of the project as it moves forwards. As an ongoing process, therefore, the project needs to

establish targets as appropriate (ref. section 4.3 on the need for a third layer of the LAF matrix).

A detailed discussion of the quality of the project design, appropriateness of the approach, output progress and achievements in connection with each component and related outputs is provided in section 5.2.

4.2. Relevance to development priorities and policies

4.2.1. Relevance to MAAHF Master Plan

The original SALEH project concept was developed in 2002, during the first year of the 'new order' following the fall of the Taliban. As mentioned, Bamyan province was highlighted as one of ten geographical locations requiring special assistance due to its natural poverty and remoteness and the depredations suffered during more than two decades of war and turmoil. Since that time government strategic development planning has undergone a series of developments, modifications and refinements, and while the original project criteria remain true, it is the present MAAHF Master Plan that concerns us here.

The present MAAHF Master Plan, completed in January 2006, succeeds the Policy and Strategic Framework developed in 2004, and looks towards the next five years to 2010. The SALEH project fits well into this time frame provided a no-cost extension is approved to the end of 2008 (see section 5.10) and that this is followed by a second phase aimed at building on the achievements of the first, of at least four and preferably five years (see section 5.11). This would see the project comfortably through the next five years and into the next cycle, which is a reasonable period, in view of the slow pace of rural development in such a harsh environment as Hazarajat.

Even in an expanded second phase, SALEH will only comprise a very modest part, in terms of financial contribution to the investment planned for the next five years estimated at USD 1,384 million. But it can be argued that with the project's role as a development catalyst, supporting community mobilisation, and through its mandate to encourage and establish linkages between communities, institutions, organisations and projects/programmes, SALEH has the potential for a developmental impact in the Hazarajat beyond the size of its budget.

The MAAHF Master Plan elaborates a new role for the ministry. The multiple roles and significance of agriculture in the Afghan economy are emphasised in the Master Plan and states that even as *"its relative importance is expected to decline, with general economic growth, agriculture is expected to increase immensely in absolute size and act as the basic engine that will transform the economy, reduce poverty, improve food security and provide alternatives to the cultivation of opium poppy"*. Particular emphasis is placed on solving the problems of: (a) food security; (b) increasing foreign exchange earnings; (c) poverty reduction; (d) and improving the status and income of women; providing alternatives to the cultivation of opium poppy. Agriculture is seen as a bastion of private enterprise and particular emphasis is placed on developing horticulture, livestock production, and cereal production (in the interest of food security). Certain cross cutting priorities are emphasised including: (a) improving natural resource management; (b) the effectiveness and relevance of research and extension (training); (c) the development of financial systems (including rural credit); (d) the development of community and farmer organisations; and (e) the enhancement and empowerment of rural women.

In view of the above, it appears that the SALEH project fits well into the general and particular themes of the MAAHF Master Plan in many respects. Fortunately, the Hazarajat is not (at present or likely to become) an area devoted to the cultivation of opium poppy. Apart

from potatoes, poplar trees, and extensive livestock production, few obvious opportunities for developing commercial farming exist in the area. However, improvements in cereal, potato and other forms of crop and fruit/nut production and horticulture will help to relieve chronic problems of food security and nutrition, and will at the same time help to relieve some of the worst aspects of rural poverty. These issues are within the capacity of the SALEH project to address through its FBOs and the project will thus fit well into the broad aims of the MAAHF Master Plan. The SALEH project also includes a strong component for small agricultural based enterprise, human capacity development (education and training) and women's empowerment as valuable contributions to the economic and social development of the region.

Recommendation: The SALEH project is already working in close collaboration with the local departments of agriculture in Bamyan province and the MAAHF was an integral part of this MTR, but nonetheless project management must ensure that the experiences, lessons learned and successes achieved by the project in the course of its various activities should be fed up to the relevant departments in the MAAHF in Kabul.

4.2.2. Relevance to FAO priorities

FAO's priorities in Afghanistan fall in well with those of the MAAHF Master Plan and the ministry as such, which FAO it is mandated to support. As the UN agency specialising in assisting the development of agriculture, FAO's international mandate is to assist crop, livestock, and food production in its broadest sense, helping to increase rural prosperity throughout the world, and improving food security. Whilst fitting well within this mandate, the SALEH project, as a rural community development project, is in many respects an unusual undertaking for FAO to be managing. Indeed, SALEH is by definition a pilot project in which FBOs are the foundation on which other activities and development initiatives may be built. The fact that the FAO headquarters in Rome and the Regional Office in Bangkok accepted the initial concept developed in 2002, and went on to turn this into a fully developed and funded project, is indication of the organisation's interest and commitment.

As recommended in section 6.1, given the novelty of the SALEH project approach, and in line with its pilot status, and the prospect of achieving interesting results in rural community and agricultural development worthy of further dissemination, a study of experiences and lessons learned should be undertaken by the appropriate department(s) of the FAO headquarters in Rome.

4.2.3. Relevance to DFID priorities

The SALEH project fits well into the current priorities of the British Government development assistance policy and thinking based on the concept of 'Sustainable Rural Development', which places particular emphasis on improving the rural livelihoods of poor communities through their full participation in all the processes of development. The Hazarajat, as one of the poorest, remotest, and least advantaged regions in Afghanistan, qualified well for a DFID-funded intervention.

4.3. Adjustment of Logical Framework Approach matrix

The Logical Framework Approach (LFA) matrix was examined in two sessions with the project staff. To bring the matrix in line with the actual situation, this led to revision of some of the objectively verifiable indicators and assumptions in the overall matrix (level 1) and of the specific indicators for monitoring, review, and impact (level 2) identified in a workshop held in March 2005. The revised overall LFA matrix is attached as Annex 5; a matrix with the revised

objectively verifiable indicators with justification is attached as Annex 6; and a matrix with the revised specific indicators for monitoring, review, and impact is attached as Annex 7.

In agreement with the nature of the project, only few details appear concerning quality, quantity, and time at level 1 and 2. As also pointed out by the consultant Barry Pound (2005), such details are needed to perform sufficiently qualified monitoring and review of project progress and achievements and therefore have to be developed; hence the following recommendation.

Recommendation: A third level of the LFA matrix should be developed by the project to cater for the need for detailed indicators referring to specific activities or types of activities developed as a result of the community action plans (CAPs) of the farmer-based organisations (FBOs) and detailed in the letters of agreements made with implementing partners.

5. IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT

5.1. Project budget and expenditure

Due to the slow upstart of activities, spending was below budget for the first year and a half. Since then, spending has been close to expectations. As of June 2006, there remains an unspent balance of around USD 3.1 million. With expected expenses amounting to around USD 1.2 million for the remaining 11 months of the project, there will, by June 2007, be an unspent balance of about USD 1.8-1.9 million. As discussed in section 5.10 below, it is recommended that this amount be used to fund a no-cost extension of the pilot project phase of 18 months.

The MTR team did not attempt to have a detailed look into funding and resource allocation, but judging from the overall accounts statement, expenditure has, by and large, followed the budget – with the exception of a prolonged inception phase (due to delayed recruitment of CTA and other senior staff). This caused the above mentioned under spending.

5.2. Activities and outputs

A detailed list of activities is given in Annex 8. Brief narrative accounts from MTR team observations are provided below. It should be noted that delays were experienced in the first year of operation due to difficulties in recruiting appropriate management and technical staff. Indeed, some positions have only recently been filled and some still remain to be filled. Further delays were experienced in September 2004 by the presidential election and in October 2005 by the parliamentary elections, which caused the UN to issue security clampdowns over these key months. Coinciding as they did with harvest time in the Hazarajat this also hampered data and survey work in two critical seasons. However, with the formation of 68 FBOs and the development of their CAPs before the autumn cultivation season of 2005, the MTR team finds that the project is now firmly on track on a sound base of local community participation and ownership as was originally intended.

At the moment, the Hazarajat - and particularly the districts in which SALEH is operating - is entirely tranquil and also unbothered by opium poppy cultivation. This also includes Bamyan Central district where the project has its management base (as it is the seat of provincial government and administration) although not at present included in SALEH activities except for some poultry activities.

5.2.1. Component 1. Capacity development for community level action to improve agricultural livelihoods and resources management

Output 1.1. Farmer based organisations (FBOs) operational, with capacity to formulate implement and monitor agricultural livelihood and development plans

Establishing FBOs is a key activity of the project. Prior to the autumn cultivation season in 2005, the process of forming FBOs was completed for 68 communities in the four project districts of Shibar (26), Yakawlang (10), Panjab (16), and Waras (16). Once formed, the FBOs are encouraged to select an executive committee to manage and organise meetings and resources, to act as the main interlocutors with the project, and to maintain relevant records.

In accordance with the three-stage CAPDP, the FBOs are developing community action plans (CAPs). These CAPs highlight what the FBOs perceive as priority needs in the agricultural sphere (in its broadest sense). A rather comprehensive set of actions are now being implemented with full community participation and ownership in response to FBO CAPs, and the MTR team were able to observe a selection of these and discuss them with the FBOs concerned in seven communities. Not all items listed in the CAPs are within the capacity of SALEH to address, in which case the project must try to link up with other organisations or institutions that have the capacity and expertise to assist.

All those engaged in or deriving a livelihood from agriculture, horticulture, livestock husbandry or related subjects are the natural members of the FBO and individuals tend to group themselves naturally round subjects of common interest. Formal membership is not required. Unlike the NSP, the FBO concept does not set out to form a new institutional / social structure, but seeks to adapt to local traditional structures and in essence aims to remain as flexible and adaptable as possible.

At the present time, the structure of the FBOs remains informal and flexible. There have been a number of recommendations that they now be given a more formal institutionalised structure (see reports of consultant Dr Barry Pound, NRI, and David Hitchcock, FAO Regional Office Bangkok). It is the view of the MTR team that this may be premature at the present stage of FBO development and might be best considered in a possible second phase of the project. At the present time, the very flexibility and informality of the FBOs and the fact that they are designed to work with rather than contrary to traditional community structures is considered to be more a strength than a weakness and more likely to survive the vicissitudes of life in a country as politically volatile and climatically harsh as Afghanistan. At this stage in their development, it should be sufficient to provide simple management and record keeping training to the key executive members of the FBOs and start to build gradually from this.

It has also been suggested that there might be some formalisation of special interest and wealth ranked grouping within each FBO. It is the opinion of the MTR team that this would be a mistake. Interest groups form naturally round different activities, be it an irrigation channel, wheat or potato production, fruit tree nurseries, orchard establishment or the health of their livestock and there is no need to formalise this. To form wealth ranked sub-groups would run the risk of creating and entrenching social divisions within these small communities that do not at present necessarily exist to that extent.

The MTR team were impressed by the sense of project ownership they found in the sample of FBOs they met and considers that their development is progressing well in the right direction and at the right pace. Institutional formalisation is likely to develop naturally with growing confidence and experience and probably will not occur (if at all) until a second phase of the project. It was interesting to note that in at least two instances the FBO members

expressed the view that the FBOs are likely to continue to exist after the conclusion of the SALEH project just because they are based on issues of common interest and fit in well with existing traditional community structures, whilst they thought that the NSP community development councils (CDC) would probably cease to exist once the block grants, round which they have been formed, cease.

It was interesting to note that in three communities where SALEH FBOs are running along side NSP CDCs there appears to be no clash of interest or confusion in the minds of the villagers and farmers as to which is which. The focus of interest is different; NSP providing a grant for the community to manage usually for larger community engineering type projects while SALEH FBOs are dealing with small structures and farmer interest activities. However, it was noteworthy in each case that there tended to be overlapping membership in the executive body of CDCs and FBOs with the same personalities holding positions on both 'shura'.

FBOs have been encouraged to form community based monitoring and evaluation cells (CBM&E) from among members of the community who are selected for the purpose of overseeing the quality of the work being jointly undertaken by the community with assistance from the SALEH project. To date 56 FBOs have appointed such CBM&E cells which are reported to be functioning surprisingly effectively. The MTR team were able to observe an example of where shoddy engineering work had been re done as the result of the action of the local CBM&E cell.

Not surprisingly, each of the seven FBOs visited by the MTR team had its own quite distinct character reflecting different personalities, ecological conditions and community social dynamics, but in all there appeared to be a highly developed sense of participation and activity ownership. But these are early days in the development of the FBOs and the first active season is not yet concluded. Suffice it to say, at this point, that SALEH has developed what appears to be a useful social / community base on which to build and develop the project over the remainder of its present life further into a second phase.

In the observation of the MTR team, the project management approach to developing FBOs is a sound one as it has remained flexible, has worked with traditional social systems rather than against them, and is 'interest group' based. In the view of the MTR team this provides a good chance for sustainability once the SALEH project finishes. The 68 FBOs also represent all the agro-ecological zones of Bamyan province, which is a sound basis for acquiring diversified experience with regard to both community development and a range of technical agriculture-related issues. At the same time, however, it was clear to the MTR team that the project's manpower resources are stretched to the limit and hence the following recommendation.

Recommendation: No geographical expansion should take place within the life of this pilot project. The project should consolidate work with the existing 68 FBOs and only allow for limited expansion to neighbouring communities on unsolicited requests – maybe to the level of around 75 FBOs. Such an expansion will require fewer resources from the project because farmer-to-farmer exchange is already taking place.

Output 1.2. Strengthened capacity of partner institutions to deliver services to FBOs in response to their development needs

Human and institutional capacity building – management and technical training

The SALEH project interacts with the FBOs either directly or through sub-contracted local NGOs or through linkages with other projects and programmes, with special skills and

expertise. Letters of agreement and as required formal contracts are drawn up to effect such work. To date, 10 local NGO / ISOs have been contracted by SALEH with altogether 16 letters of agreement / contracts (see Annex 9) to deliver specific services to FBOs as identified by CAPs including adult literacy and agricultural training, poultry production, bee-keeping, veterinary care and livestock nutrition, kitchen garden vegetable production, training in improved agricultural techniques, and small engineering structures mainly focused on irrigation, flood control and water harvesting. The NGO staff receive periodic training as required in both technical matters and management, office procedures and record keeping. Training is also provided as applicable in such things as participatory rural analysis (PRA) techniques and social / community mobilisation. Involving NGOs in this way is a key aspect in the project approach. The MTR team finds this approach sound, provided the work of the NGOs continues to be closely monitored.

Other training courses of different kinds for different categories and groups are provided for FBOs, provincial and district agricultural personnel, SALEH project staff, NGOs and others. Most of this training is conducted locally in Bamyan province and some in Kabul. For details see list of activities in Annex 8.

Strengthening human capacity - literacy and agricultural training

The demand for literacy training came directly out of FBO CAPs both for adult men and women. This priority activity from most women's groups was in response to their perceived lack of participation in village-level decision-making. These courses not only give every indication of being enthusiastically received but are already generating a demand for additional courses, including vocational training, and wider geographical expansion. To date, a total of 6,920 adult men and women have taken courses in literacy to 'stage 2' of the official government approved curriculum combined with agriculture messages. The curriculum for women, in particular, is being targeted at an improved understanding of basic agricultural activities and enterprise development in various forms such as kitchen gardens and honey production. The combination of literacy with agricultural technical training for rural men and women in a region where adult literacy is low even by Afghan standards is proving to be a potent force. The MTR team was able to observe two literacy courses with women, one in Waras and one in Panjab, one poultry training session with women in Bamyan and one agricultural technical training session for men provided by the district government extension agent (supported by the project) in Yakawlang. In all these sessions the interest and the enthusiasm of the participants was very obvious. In the case of the women's literacy courses, the reading ability achieved to date by women who had no previous formal schooling was impressive and empowered them to play a greater role in the farming system. The MTR team was not able to observe adult literacy courses for men, as these are concentrated in the winter months when there are fewer demands for agricultural labour.

Recommendation: There is a considerable demand from the FBOs that the literacy and agricultural training programme be expanded and strengthened to include vocational training. Within its funding and manpower capacity, the project should respond positively to this demand. This will also fit in very well with the proposed NZAID-funded Women's Empowerment Project (WEP) (see section 6.3). No doubt, successful vocational training will lead to additional demands for developing market outlets and linkages.

Output 1.3. Effective partnerships developed within and between FBOs, GO and NGOs

Letters of agreement, coordination, institutional and organisational collaboration

In addition to the 11 local NGOs working (or having been working) under sub-contracts to SALEH, the project works in close collaboration with the provincial agricultural administration

based in Bamyán centre and with the district government agricultural extension officers. Although the government departments have few resources and their capacity is minimal, the project does whatever it can to involve the local district agricultural personnel in the project activities and together with the FBOs. The MTR team were able to observe the good relations existing between the project's district community liaison officers (CLOs) and the district agricultural extension officers, which was not in any way contrived. Whereas letters of agreement and contracts bind the SALEH project with the NGO partners, the relationship with the government offices is more informal. Although there is little that the project can do to redress the problems faced by the district agricultural officers in terms of lack of resources, it does what it can. In theory, the FAO and the provincial and district agricultural offices should share facilities. In practice, this has not proved possible. In only one instance is the SALEH project occupying a building constructed for the government. In this instance it is a building intended to house the local veterinary animal health clinic in Yakawlang, which is as yet unoccupied for that purpose.

The MTR team was able to observe, at first hand, the close collaboration between the SALEH project and some of the other FAO projects. These include the FAO seed programme (GCP/AFG/018/EC) soon to start a new phase in October 2006; the FAO poultry project (GCP/AFG/030/USA), whose Bamyán-based activities are presently being provided with hiatus funding by the SALEH project until new USAID funding comes on stream later this year; and the FAO human nutrition project (GCP/AFG/039/GER) which is particularly closely associated with vegetable production and bee-keeping and can use the FBOs as a social platform on which to base its applied research and training programme. Many CAPs have identified irrigation / water catchment related problems which are beyond the capacity of the SALEH project to address. For this it is hoped to enlist the support of the World Bank / FAO Emergency Irrigation Programme (UTF/AFG/035/AFG) of which more is written below.

In Yakawlang and Shibar districts, FBOs coincide with the NSP in many villages. In these districts, NSP is being facilitated by the INGOs UNHABITAT and AKDN, respectively. As already mentioned, the two programmes appear to be running in parallel without difficulty and in the villages visited by the MTR team, NSP CDCs and FBO executive bodies appear to often comprise the same individuals.

Relations between the SALEH team and the main INGOs working in the region, namely OXFAM, Solidarites and AKDN, appear to be cordial and on three occasions the MTR team stayed overnight in INGO bases.

In the observation of the MTR team, the SALEH approach to coordination and collaboration is positive and effective and relationships between the project staff and the FBOs, GOs, NGOs and other FAO projects appears to be effective.

5.2.2. Component 2. Improved food security income generation and employment opportunities, and resource utilisation, through community-based action

Output 2.1. Management of common property resources (water and rangeland) improved

No activities have yet been identified and no FBOs have yet highlighted issues relating to common rights to water or pastures among its CAPs. As reflected in the LAF matrix, the objectively verifiable indicators assumed that issues relating to common property resources in respect to managing water for irrigation and drinking and for pastures and common-land grazing would be mentioned as priority issues in the FBO CAPs. The fact that this has not proved to be the case may not come as a surprise. According to the ancient traditions of the country well-developed traditional social mechanisms exist for dealing with issues concerning

common grazing rights and water. This does not mean that problems do not exist, or that sometimes these prove difficult to resolve, but that rural communities generally prefer to deal with such issues themselves, according to traditional social custom, rather than seeking assistance from outsiders or the government. The SALEH project is in principle inductive and not prescriptive and can only react to issues as they are prioritised by the FBOs in the CAPs. Thus, this issue needs to be treated with more flexibility and in any case most common property resources recommendations fall beyond the scope of this project to address adequately.

Generally speaking, village communities in the Hazarajat as elsewhere in Afghanistan have well developed social systems of managing individual farmer / land-owners rights to water and irrigation turns, either through an elected *mirab* (water master) or with the community elders. In the Hazarajat, irrigation systems are generally small and not so problematic to administer.

In the past, conflicts over grazing were mainly between the settled Hazara population and the Pashtun nomad groups (*kuchis*), who traditionally brought their flocks to graze the central mountains in the summer. At the present time, the *kuchis* are not coming to the Hazarajat in the summer and as local settled stocking rates are still generally rather low, conflicts over pasture between Hazara communities are probably rather infrequent. However, the project is conscious that issues relating to grazing rights probably do exist as a hidden issue and there has recently been a consultancy input by an expert in land tenure and common-land rights, Dr Liz Alden Wily, who recommends that the project should consider supporting two pilot initiatives for community-based pasture and grazing management.

Output 2.2. Sustainable improvements in farming systems developed, tested and evaluated

A number of project activities related to agricultural improvements, introductions and innovations, are implemented as direct responses to issues prioritised by FBO CAPs. They are in line with the project's concept and purpose and within the capacity of the SALEH project to support either directly or as sub-contracted through local NGOs. As necessary, the collaboration and technical assistance of other relevant FAO projects is being sought and given, as for instance the FAO seed programme, the FAO human nutrition project, the FAO poultry project, and as in the case of livestock vaccination from in-house expertise in FAO Kabul.

All activities engage the full cooperation and participation of the FBOs concerned. The FBOs select individual farmers to manage crop demonstrations and farmer field trials and for seed multiplication as well as to manage fruit tree nurseries, model orchards, and poplar woodlots. These are also used as practical farmer field schools.

This is the first full season of such activities and most of them are still ongoing. Some, as for instance the establishment and management of fruit tree nurseries and orchards, will continue throughout the length of this first phase of SALEH and into a second phase if there is one. Suffice it to say that despite the requirement for technical improvement in some instances the project is moving in the right direction. The activities appear to be well appreciated by the communities concerned and well within local technical capability to adopt and absorb, as observed by the MTR team. There is a strong sense of community ownership but also these initial activities are giving rise for demands for increased and expanded project support.

The following is a brief review of key project activities concerning improvements in farming systems.

Improved wheat production and on-farm seed multiplication for farmer-to-farmer distribution

Since establishment of the FBOs, the project, in response to CAPs, has made a good start in introducing appropriate, well tested winter hardy, potentially high-yielding, disease (rust) resistant and farmer acceptable varieties of wheat provided to the project through the FAO seed programme (GCP/AFG/018/EC) working together with the Improved Seed Enterprises (ISE) in Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif. At present, a total of 20 irrigated wheat demonstrations are ongoing – 5 in Shibar; 5 in Yakawlang; 5 in Panjab; and 5 in Waras. Key farmers selected by the FBOs have received small quantities of seed of two varieties, Gul 96 and Solh 2002, for comparison with their existing wheat types. At the same time they get training in the cultural practices required for producing a seed crop for further distribution through seed/grain exchange with other farmers. These demonstrations are being used as farmer field schools (FFS). Although the MTR team visited the project prior to harvest, the wheat demonstration fields observed looked promising at this stage and the CLOs were instructing the ‘seed’



farmers in good practices such as rouging for weed plants and ‘off types’. But it was too early to make a final assessment. The project is also collaborating with the FAO seed project in investigating the possibility of establishing small farmer based seed production units in the project districts and a senior member of the FAO seed project team was visiting the project for this purpose.

Photo 2 Wheat demonstration field in Yakawlang

Less successful have been similar demonstrations of wheat on the rain-fed (*ialmi*) land – 2 in Panjab and 2 in Waras – as lack of rainfall has led to complete crop failure. Rain-fed farming in the Hazarajat is always very risky.

Recommendation: The project should continue to support the dissemination of tested improved varieties of wheat and other cereals and farmer seed production through the FBOs in close collaboration with the FAO seed programme (GCP/AFG/018/EC - in its final phase and the new programme GCP/AFG/045/EC expected to start in October 2005). This is essential to ensure that existing FBOs continue to receive regular inputs of small quantities of the latest appropriate varieties for multiplication by key farmers, technically supervised jointly by the district departments of agriculture and the SALEH technical staff.

Improved potato and seed potato production and storage

Potatoes are an important subsistence and cash crop in two of the project districts, Shibar and Yakawlang, and a primary subsistence crop in Panjab and Waras. The recruitment, in May 2006, of an agronomist familiar with potato culture now provides the project with the capacity to provide technical assistance, which it did not possess earlier. Despite a late start,

a few useful demonstrations of improved varieties and cultural practices have been established - 1 in Shibar and 2 in Yakawlang - in response to FBO CAPs. In addition to local farmers, a local NGO IP is receiving technical training in potato culture.

It has long been observed that a post harvest potato losses are a very serious problem and that 30-70% of many farmers' potato crops are lost as the result of poor winter storage. Although the CAPs have not specifically highlighted this particular issue, this is most likely due to the fact that the communities are unaware of the existence of affordable alternatives to their present primitive method of pit storage.

Recommendation: The project must continue to pay close attention to introducing improvements in cultural practice, potato seed production and introduction of high yielding varieties, taking due account of local preference in potato types and market demand. Close collaboration should be maintained with the new FAO seed programme in Bamyan under GCP/AFG/045/EC expected to start in October 2006 for five years, which will have a potato component.

Recommendation: In view of the significance of post harvest potato losses whilst in store, particular attention must be paid to the introduction of improved storage designs that are within the capacity of village communities to construct with their own labour. The project should establish demonstrations to illustrate the benefit of improved storage designs for further expansion with those FBOs who show an interest in this matter. A number of storage models already exist in the area, introduced by various organisations, for assessment and consideration.

Recommendation: In view of the importance of potatoes as one of the very few cash crops produced in certain districts of Bamyan province, the project should pay particular attention to assisting FBOs establish or improve market linkages for this crop.

Fruit tree nurseries

In response to FBO CAPs, a total of 19 small farmer-managed fruit tree nurseries of approximately 0.5 *jerib* (1/10 ha) have been established in the four project districts – 4 in Shibar; 3 in Yakawlang; 6 in Panjab; and 6 in Waras. The farmers on whose land these nurseries are established have been selected by the FBOs according to a set of rational criteria including: willingness to manage such an enterprise, having the right skills and interest, and being prepared to put aside well-sited land with sufficient irrigation water for this purpose. The MTR team saw a number of these nurseries and spoke with the FBOs and with the farmers concerned. All the nurseries are stocked with seedlings of apples, apricots and almonds. In most cases the apple seedlings have been killed by late frost, but the other species are doing reasonably well, if better in some nurseries than others. Due to the climate of the Hazarajat, probably no more than 20-30% will be ready for budding in August this year, the remainder not until August 2007. Distribution to other farmers will not, therefore, take place until the early spring of 2008 for 20-30%, and for the remaining 70-80% not until spring 2009. As might be expected, there is some variation in the quality of nursery management, but on the whole, in view of the fact that this is new to the selected farmers, the results are satisfactory at this stage.

Recommendation: The project should address the need for forward planning and expansion of fruit tree nurseries to accommodate a three to four year cycle of production. The fruit tree nursery activity will require close technical supervision through all its stages of development up to the end of the project. In view of the altitude and the incidence of late frost in many locations, care needs to be taken in the selection of the varieties of fruit for budding. It is

known that apples do well in most of the villages where the nurseries have been established, it is less certain how almonds and apricots will perform in some locations. With respect to the apples, it is recommended that the project should consider procuring appropriate semi-dwarfing rootstocks (such as MM106) for local vegetative (layering) propagation rather than relying on seedling rootstocks. Experience elsewhere in Afghanistan has shown that there is no need for such work to be confined to government managed nurseries. If properly trained the techniques required for propagating 'Malling' rootstocks are well within the technical capacity of private nurserymen such as those being trained within the SALEH project as part of the FBOs.

Model orchards and intercropping

Following on from the establishment of fruit tree nurseries, and in accord with FBO CAPs, 17 small model demonstration orchards have been established – 3 in Shibar; 4 in Yakawlang; 5 in Panjab; and 5 in Waras - with farmers selected by the FBOs stocked with budded saplings obtained from reliable existing nurseries in other provinces. These are being used to train farmers in the form of farmer field schools in orchard lay out and management on an ongoing basis. The orchards have been established mainly in villages where few orchards exist or where those that do exist have been established some years ago according to traditional practice. The MTR team saw a number of these model orchards newly established in the spring of 2006. These orchards were also being used to demonstrate the advantages and benefits of inter-row cropping with fodder legumes, pulses and vegetables. It is still early to make a meaningful technical assessment of these orchards, which mainly contain a mixture of apples, apricots and plums, budded with popular varieties of these fruits. Suffice it to say that so far they appear to be well laid out and that initial losses appear to be minimal.

Recommendation: To follow up on a good start, the project has to provide close technical supervision of the model orchards until the end of the project through the various stages of the orchards' maturity.

Improved poplar cultivation (small-scale agro forestry)

Poplar cultivation is a very profitable sideline for many small farmers in the Hazarajat and the climate and comparatively slow growth of poplars in this region mean that they are much sought after for building material and roofing poles outside the region. Many rural bazaars in the Hazarajat include small sawmills, timber merchants and carpenters. Poplars are generally cultivated along the line of rivers and irrigation channels rather than in small block plantations, as is common in northern Afghanistan. In response to FBO CAP requests, the project in the spring of 2006 initiated a small but significant activity to establish small 'woodlots' with cuttings from selected poplar clones and hybrids (obtained from the Global Partnership for Afghanistan Project in Parwan). These demonstration woodlots - 4 in Panjab and 4 in Waras - have been established in order to (a) compare the indigenous poplars of the region with a selection of three of these hybrids; (b) provide a local source of cuttings of those hybrids that are found to be superior; and (c) demonstrate and train local farmers in more effective methods of propagation and poplar culture than presently observed in the Hazarajat. The MTR team saw a number of these newly established woodlots. It is too early to make a technical judgement except to say that this intervention has clearly created a lot of interest from the FBOs concerned. The farmers involved in managing these woodlots have in every case been selected by the FBO.

Recommendation: To follow up on a good start and important interest already generated, the project has to provide close technical supervision of the poplar woodlots until the end of the present project.

Vegetable and pulse production

In response to FBO CAPs, the project has an important activity encouraging the cultivation of vegetables. To date, this has concentrated in Shibar and Yakawlang districts. As this is closely associated with human nutrition, collaboration is being developed with the FAO human nutrition project (GCP/AFG/039/GER), which started in 2005. To date, this component has concentrated on the distribution of seed of a selection of vegetable as well as the production of vegetable seedlings by farmers selected by the FBOs under low plastic tunnels for distribution mainly to vulnerable women. From 3 sites in Shibar and 2 sites in Yakawlang, more than 1,000 women received seedlings and others received seed. The vegetable production programme is heavily focused on village women. It should be noted that in Panjab and Waras, FBOs complained that technical training in vegetable production had been provided without any seed or seedlings with which the women could put this training into practise.

Recommendation: The project should take care that technical training in agriculture should not be provided in a void but should be combined wherever possible with practical application in order to reinforce the messages provided.

The project has also included a small activity introducing the cultivation of *Phasoleus* beans to the cropping systems in all four project districts – 2 in Shibar; 2 in Yakawlang; 2 in Panjab; and 3 in Waras - as a useful addition to the legumes and pulses they already traditionally cultivate. Pulses make up an important part of the traditional diet of Hazara villagers and beans cultivation has already been successfully adopted in a number of neighbouring provinces and districts. It is an ideal crop for intercropping with fruit trees. These small demonstrations also aim to compare several varieties of bean with those grown from locally available seed and to multiply seed from the most promising.

A number of NGO household vegetable production projects have been implemented in the Hazarajat since the early 1990s in the districts where the project is operating, without achieving any noticeable sustainability. There is an obvious need to know the reasons why these former initiatives do not appear to have had a lasting impact. One reason could be the unavailability of appropriate vegetable seed in the local markets and the dependency of such programmes on the agencies concerned to provide the necessary inputs on an annual basis. Another reason might be cultural taste.

Recommendation: The project needs to analyse the reasons why former NGO initiatives in vegetable production do not appear to have had a lasting impact. Note is, however, taken of the fact that vegetable cultivation where it is being supported by the project is at the direct request of the FBO CAP and therefore has a greater likelihood of being accepted.

It has been well proven that the species of vegetable included in the project can be cultivated in the region. In cases where household food security and nutrition is the priority, rather than commercial vegetable production, the correct type of seed must be introduced and sustainable local seed production introduced.

Recommendation: In such situations where household food security and nutrition is the priority, rather than commercial vegetable production, only seed of open pollinated varieties of vegetable should be introduced (rather than hybrid seed). Wherever possible, emphasis should be placed on farmer / household based seed production in the interests of sustainability.

Farming / cropping systems

The project still has an unfilled position with the title of 'Farming System Economics Officer', which has proved difficult to fill. Observations over a number of years, also referred to in the original field work and concept paper prepared by FAO in 2002, on which the SALEH project is based, have drawn attention to the rather sophisticated cropping systems practiced by many rural communities in the Hazarajat which are part of their traditional coping mechanisms in a harsh environment. These traditional cropping systems include interesting combinations of pulses and legumes grown in rotation with cereal crops and potatoes as well as the comprehensive use of many wild and cultivated plants both for feeding livestock and human beings. These deserve closer study, as they are part of the agricultural survival strategies developed by poor isolated communities living under harsh environmental and climatic conditions and should not be dismissed.

Recommendation: The project should consider fielding a consultant experienced in the cropping systems and use of natural and cultivated plants to make a study of this subject preferably with a Central Asian/Near East highland experience. The SALEH project provides an ideal platform in which to base such a study in dialogue with established FBOs.

Note on livestock health and husbandry

The project does not, at the present time, possess any in-house technical capacity in either livestock health or husbandry, yet many FBO CAPs prioritise issues related to both subjects as well as to the problems of degraded pastures. Because of FBO CAP demand, the project has supported a couple of vaccination programmes for small ruminants (*Enterotoxaemia*). These initiatives have been sub-contracted through NGOs with technical experience and under advice from the FAO office in Kabul. In its initial concept, it was envisaged that the project should wherever possible help to link such demands with parallel government, UN or NGO lead programmes operating in the Hazarajat. This does not always appear to have been very easy, but must remain the primary role of the SALEH project in this respect, as taking responsibility for the implementation of a vaccination programme (which outside its TOR) carries with it some risk. It must be hoped that in future this will be easier as more effective animal health programmes develop.

A programme based on a network of private paravets and veterinary field units (VFUs) is managed by the Dutch Committee for Afghanistan. Until recently this was funded under the USAID Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Programme (RAMP) and since 2005 claims to be supporting a total of 14 VFUs in 6 districts. But the full extent of its village coverage is not known. The RAMP programme is running down and will be replaced towards the end of 2006 by new USAID funding and a new programme. The government animal health service has virtually no capacity.

Recommendation: Although it is not envisaged that the SALEH project should assume responsibility for veterinary matters in the Hazarajat, as this is outside its TOR, the project should, however, endeavour to help establish linkages between the FBOs and whatever livestock health programmes are being managed or are developed in the region. However, the project might consider acquiring technical capacity on issues relating to livestock husbandry and nutrition. These issues are already included in the project's farmer and extension training / literacy programme.

Note on issues related to degraded pastures and pasture management

As highlighted in a number of CAPs, there is a serious need for assistance in addressing the problem of degraded pastures and grazing lands. Although often rather simplistically

expressed, the main causes are the extensive cultivation of traditional upland grazing (often very steep slopes) for very low production and high risk rain-fed wheat production as well as the uprooting of deep-rooted woody plants such as *Artemisia* for winter fuel. This has proved more damaging than heavy stocking, which is not the case at present. It was notable that in one village where this problem had been highlighted in the FBO CAP, the villagers admitted that they now had to walk almost two hours to find a source of such fuel whereas ten years ago it had been one hour and twenty years ago much closer than that, but out of memory!

It should be noted that the collection of certain perennial mountain plants for winter fodder is sustainable as only the tops are cut, when mature, leaving the root systems undamaged to grow again the next season.

Little can be done to alter climatic conditions and the quality of the grazing certainly varies considerably between season of drought and good precipitation as observed over recent years.

Recommendation: The project should consider engaging a consultant specialist in pasture and rangeland management, experienced in the pastoral management customs, issues, ecologies and botany of highland Central Asia and the Near East of which Afghanistan is a part (e.g. Turkey, Iran, and Central Asia), to study the situation and develop a set of recommendations for meaningful and practical interventions.

Output 2.3. Livelihoods diversification and small enterprise development promoted and supported.

In agreement with the FBO CAPs, the project assists in establishing diversified livelihoods through support to the establishment of small agro-enterprises targeted at women and vulnerable households, for food security as well as income generation. Initially, this includes poultry production and bee-keeping as described below.

Poultry production

Fortunately, it has been possible for the project to directly associate itself with the FAO poultry project, previously funded under the USAID RAMP programme, as a sub-project funded under its umbrella. This situation is expected to last until December 2006 when fresh funding is expected. Close collaboration is expected to continue, nonetheless, and should include an expansion into more districts. So far, the project has provided training, chicks and technical equipment to about 1,000 poor women in Bamyan Central District and Shibar, and involving another 750 women is about to start. The MTR team met with the project's regional manager Dr Safar Ali and attended one women's training course, but was not able to make a technical assessment beyond this. However, reports on the progress and effectiveness of this sub-project appear to be satisfactory.

Recommendation: Close collaboration should be maintained between the SALEH project and next phase of the FAO poultry project after the new USAID funding comes on stream.

Bee-keeping

The bee-keeping activity is managed under contract with the national NGO Education Aid Centre (EAC) that has special expertise and experience in this subject. The activity has particular application for women and poor households with little or no access to agricultural land and focus on training and equipping poor village women with colonies of honeybees with the purpose of producing a surplus of honey and beeswax for sale. So far, 160 women

have received training, bee colonies, hives and essential equipment. The MTR team did not have time to observe the activities, but reports indicate that it is proving very successful and that already surplus honey is being produced and that a marketing mechanism is being developed.

Recommendation: Bee-keeping appears to be a successful project based on precedents elsewhere in Afghanistan and certainly should be continued. Any technical assessment would require a specialist in this subject to review this activity.

Output 2.4. Local infrastructure affecting agricultural livelihoods improved

Irrigation and other small engineering works

The project has the facility to support the repair, improvement and construction of small structures prioritised by FBO CAPs, for irrigation, bank protection, flood control and the like, up to a ceiling cost of USD 5,000 per project. In response to FBO CAPs, the project has already completed a number of such structures - 3 culverts; 1 night storage basin; 2 intakes; 1 canal rehabilitation; and 1 spring rehabilitation - and others are in prospect or ongoing. Some of these are implemented with the direct involvement of project staff (if necessary with engineering design assistance provided by UNOPS engineers, free of charge). Some are implemented through sub-contracted national NGOs. The MTR team was able to observe a number of these structures in each of the districts visited. Although there had been criticism by the FBO CBM&E representatives on the quality of work in some instances, the MTR team was rather impressed by the quality of most of these small structures. The communities appear on the whole to be well satisfied and in those cases where complaints had been made the original failings had been rectified. In all instances, the communities had contributed at least 20% of the cost in labour and material. The MTR team was also rather impressed by the indigenous skills to be found in some of the Hazara villages, probably due to the fact that many Hazaras have gained experience in masonry and construction work whilst working as migrant labourers either within Afghanistan or abroad. In those cases where the work has been sub-contracted to NGOs, the ISO is paid in three payments, on start-up, site inspection during work, and on completion of the work.

Many CAPs identify infrastructure engineering works that are beyond the technical or financial capacity of the project. These are mainly, but not exclusively, associated with irrigation, water harvesting and flood control and come under the natural remit of the Emergency Irrigation Rehabilitation Programme (EIRP) funded by the World Bank and implemented by FAO (UTF/AFG/035/AFG). Bamyán province is included in the Central Region with its management base in the Ministry of Irrigation in Kabul and it is only recently that a separate sub-management group, staffed with one international and several national engineers, was established to give special attention to Bamyán and several neighbouring provinces. As no EIRP staff are based in Bamyán, the somewhat tenuous lines of communication have not helped close collaboration with SALEH. Although considerable efforts are now being made by both sides to improve collaboration, the fact that the EIRP, in its present phase, is due to be completed in September 2007 does not leave much time for it to take on or complete many of the projects arising out of FBO CAPs. However, it is expected that there will be a second phase, which would tie in with a no-cost extension of SALEH and its possible second phase.

Where NSP is operating, some of these larger infrastructure and construction works may be assisted out of the community block grants if prioritised by the CDCs or by the UNOPS programme. At present, the National Emergency Employment Programme (NEEP) does not appear to be operating in any of the project districts.

Recommendation: To meet the justifiable priorities of FOB CAPs, close collaboration should be maintained between the SALEH project and the major infrastructure programmes whether focused on irrigation and water issues, roads or other forms of infrastructure, whether they be under National Priority Programmes such as NSP, NEEP, NADP etc or others funded under WB, USAID or other bilateral donors.

5.2.3. Component 3. A framework for dissemination and replication of lessons in improving agricultural livelihoods and natural resource management, linked to provincial and district planning

Output 3.1. Improved knowledge base on current livelihood systems, their constraints and opportunities, and community needs and resources

A number of project activities already contribute to the generation of an improved knowledge base on livelihood systems. Most notably, rural livelihoods specialist consultant Dr Barry Pound from the Natural Resource Institute (NRI) in the UK visited the project twice. First in November 2003, when the consultant helped to set up the project's Livelihoods Systems Analysis system, and more recently in October-November 2005, when he undertook an interim evaluation of the performance of FBOs. His reports are an essential part of the project documentation. (For further detail on consultancy inputs, see section 5.3.) The project carries out a livelihood system analysis survey on an annual basis as part of ongoing activity and is constantly on the look out for success cases to facilitate problem resolution and failures in order to adjust the programme to in a more effective direction. As the project is still ongoing, activities related to dissemination are probably best planned for the final part of the project during the proposed 18 months no-cost extension.

Output 3.2. Provincial and district natural resources management plans developed and implemented

There is still insufficient capacity at provincial and district level to formulate natural resources management plans. Indeed, at this stage, provincial and district level agricultural and related personnel hardly appear to be aware of the Master Plan(s) developed in Kabul. This is still some way in the future.

Output 3.3. Information and lessons learned based on project experiences used to inform national and provincial policy and reinforce planning and management capacity in other development programmes and provinces

Recording of lessons and information sharing is an ongoing process in which the MTR team observed that project management is fully engaged. However, at this stage of the project it is still too early to draw definitive conclusions concerning impact and effects. It is recommended that the project should not attempt to upscale or attempt to replicate outside the present project area before the end of the present phase (including a no-cost extension of 18 months). Lessons learned will evolve over the next two years and may be used as the basis on which to design a second four or five-year phase with expanded geographical and possibly technical responsibilities. It is suggested that such lessons that do develop out of the project experience might be disseminated through a series of workshops at national level once the time is appropriate, possibly during the last six months of the present phase.

It has to be accepted that within the existing project design there are limited avenues to influence policy other than through the presentation of primary data at national level. However, it is suggested that half way through the proposed no-cost extension FAO might consider sending a small specialist team to study and help to analyse the experiences,

results and lessons learned through the SALEH project to assist with this purpose (see recommendation in section 6.1).

Recommendation: Given the novelty of the SALEH project approach, and in line with its pilot status, and the prospect of achieving interesting results in rural community and agricultural development worthy of further dissemination, a study of experiences and lessons learned should be undertaken by the appropriate department(s) of the FAO headquarters in Rome in collaboration with the GOA. An appropriate timing for this could be some time in the middle of the proposed no-cost extension period 2007-2008.

Recommendation: Results and lessons learned through the SALEH project should be disseminated through a series of workshops at national level once the time is appropriate, possibly during the last six months of the present phase.

5.3. Backstopping and external consultancies

The project has made extensive use of FAO Regional Office technical support and backstopping as well as of external consultants. A brief review of some of these inputs and related outputs, based on availability of documents and relevance to the MTR, is given below. References to related reports are given in the list of documents in Annex 4.

5.3.1. FAO Regional Office backstopping

The FAO Regional Office in Bangkok has provided support to the project in a range of fields. Most importantly, this includes regular general backstopping provided by Mr David Hitchcock, ATS Farming Systems and Marketing. Mr Hitchcock has been closely involved with the SALEH project from the beginning and played an initial role in preparing the project document. His inputs and backstopping have been and continue to be of great value to the project's development and to project management. The MTR team met on several occasions with Mr David Hitchcock, who was in Kabul during the MTR mission, and discussed the project concept and development at some length. This gave the impression of a very thorough and dynamic support and backstopping provided by FAO Regional Office, which greatly helps the project. However, in the view of the MTR team the institutionalisation of the FBOs, as proposed by Mr Hitchcock, at this stage may be premature as stated above (see section 5.2).

Issues related to soil sampling and surveying have been dealt with by Mr Hiroshi Hiraoka, FAO Regional Office, who has prepared a series of useful technical notes on fertiliser, soil sampling, and agro-ecological zoning. They are primarily in the form of technical guides. Other issues dealt with by FAO Regional Office include land management, gender issues, agro-processing, aquaculture scoping, and rural finance. A list of all missions is provided in Annex 10.

The project expresses overall satisfaction with the FAO backstopping and technical support missions and finds them very useful with regard to both technical and institutional issues.

5.3.2. External consultancies

Inputs by external consultants have played an important role in supporting and guiding the project and in setting the agenda for further discussions on project development. Consultancy inputs on the issues of land tenure and common property rights; rural livelihoods; the performance of FBO; watershed management; development of potential high-value crop and crop products; and training were highlighted to the MTR team and will be

briefly discussed below. Other issues have been horticulture; value added crop products processing; and assessment of agricultural, horticultural and livestock market chains and facilities for processing agricultural products (including storage). A list of all consultancies is given in Annex 11.

Land tenure issues and common property rights

This consultancy was carried out by Dr Liz Alden Wily, independent expert in land tenure issues and common property rights (water and common grazing lands etc) in May-June 2006. Dr Wily's mission report is still awaited, but a brief summary of her recommendations has been made available to the MTR team. It is highlighted that SALEH should go ahead with a community based pasture management exercise, working at two levels on two sets of pasture tenure and management issues. The first involving a wide range of communities, and the second involving three specific pastures and dealing with more complex issues, including access to pasture by seasonal nomads. No doubt, the full report describes in more detail the methodologies the consultant envisages and recommends. A further follow-up mission is envisaged for 2007 and it is hoped that it will be possible to follow this up within the existing SALEH field project and its 68 FBOs. It has to be noted that at present, nowhere in the project districts are Pashtun nomads (*kuchis*) returning to their previous summer grazing lands, but that is not to say that it may not happen in the future.

Rural livelihoods

The consultancy inputs on rural livelihoods by Dr Barry Pound of Natural Resource Institute, UK, are among the most significant in the project. Dr Pound undertook two missions; the first in November 2003 that helped to set up the livelihoods analysis system for the project, and the second in October-November 2005 that reviewed the FBOs. Dr Pound's latest mission report (November 2005) is still in draft form and includes a list of 31 recommendations.

In the view of the MTR team, these recommendations might be improved by some refinement. Although some are pertinent and relevant to the SALEH project and have been duly noted by the project management, others appear to be either statements of what is already the case, or refer to issues already being addressed by the project. Reference to the need for micro-finance refers to an issue that is outside the mandate and direct responsibility of SALEH in its present form (as referred to in section 5.4 below).

Dr Pound lays great stress on the need for institutional formalisation of the FBOs and for the formal institution of sub-interest groups and wealth ranking. In the view of the MTR team, institutional formalisation of the FBOs and of sub-interest groups and wealth ranking require further discussion. Such formalisations appear to be premature in the present stage of FBO development or inappropriate in the local social context (see more in section 5.2 above). The MTR team does not aim to undertake a detailed critique of Dr Pound's recommendations, but suggest that his long list requires some review, refinement and in parts further discussion.

Watershed management

A consultancy on watershed management was carried out by Mr Krishna Poudel (October 2005). The value of this consultancy input has to be considered in the long term as much for what may be required for the future during a second phase. Much of what is recommended is beyond the capacity and scope of SALEH in its present form and phase. However, SALEH has provided a useful platform from which to start the baseline study, assessment and planning work. This was seen as the initial phase of an overarching TOR on watershed management activities and the task was separated into two phases. The initial phase concentrates on a selection of mid-level watershed(s) in the SALEH project area (two

watersheds involving six communities in Shibar district), collection of detailed watershed-based information and concluding with a training seminar / workshop and the preparation of a management plan. The second phase aims at preparing a draft proposal for a watershed management project, which would support the SALEH project. In the present time scale, this is likely to come on stream (if approved and funded) towards the end of the present phase of the SALEH project and extend into a second phase if approved.

Development of potential high-value crops and crop products

A consultancy on development of potential high-value crops and crop products was carried out by Mr Kazim Kemal-ur-Rahim (May 2005). The main findings of this consultancy appear to confirm well-known problems and highlight the few potentials. These include: that the area has a great potential for potato seed production; that there is an urgent requirement for better designed winter storage of potatoes, and that there is a potential in some locations in the Hazarajat for increased orchard establishment and fruit production. Recommendations were also made for the adoption of different methods of fruit, vegetable, and potato preservation - a subject being followed up by the FAO human nutrition project.

Training

In June-July 2005, international training consultant Hukum Bahadur Singh prepared a series of comprehensive training modules. The general opinion of project management is that at the time they were prepared they were probably too advanced for the situation, but that with the passing of time and the increasing maturity of the project, some of these modules are now starting to become more relevant.

Development of agro-processing

A consultancy on the development of agro-processing (value added and nutrition) was done by Ms Win Win Kyi (April 2005). The consultant mainly looked at various vegetable crops grown (or being encouraged to be grown) in Hazarajat family kitchen gardens. The report provides some suggested methods of preservation, which if not already known, may prove useful to the FAO human nutrition project that is working in close collaboration with SALEH.

5.4. Need for micro-credit system

The need for a rural credit system was repeatedly expressed by farmers and members of FBOs met by the MTR team. All complained that existing rural credit schemes managed by for instance AKDN pitch their rates of interest too high for agricultural loans. However, it is outside the scope or mandate of SALEH to itself manage a rural credit scheme. In fact, the project is expressly excluded from doing so by its mandate as an FAO project. Contacts have been made by the project with the Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan (MISFA) programme, but it is uncertain when this programme will become functional in the project areas. AKDN is operating a credit line in some of the districts of Bamyán province but not in the specific SALEH areas. Several of the FBOs met by the MTR team were aware of this programme but considered the rate of interest to be too high for agricultural loans. Most of the beneficiaries under the AKDN credit programme appear to be shopkeepers and small businesses rather than farmers. Simultaneously with the MTR, FAO fielded a rural finance consultant, Mr Ralph Houtman, whose report is expected to be of great interest to the project in determining future strategies concerning micro-credit.

Recommendation: While the SALEH project is excluded by its mandate from establishing its own micro-finance services, it must continue to pursue the issue with MISFA and other organisations to encourage them to establish micro-finance services in the project areas to cater for the needs of poor farmers.

5.5. Poppy cultivation

Up until now, opium poppy cultivation has not been a serious consideration in the Hazarajat. Poppy has never been cultivated, except on a small-scale experimental basis, in any of the four districts that are the present focus of the SALEH project attention (Shibar, Yakawlang; Panjab and Waras), and these trials were not successful enough to impress the local farmers. In 2003 and 2004, some opium poppy was cultivated in the Khamard and Saighan valleys, but these are not included as SALEH project areas. Even in these locations the crop does not appear to have been very successful and cultivation has now stopped. To the south of the project area, some poppy is cultivated in the district of Daikundi in upper Uruzgan and also rather unsuccessfully in Lal wa Sar Jangal in eastern Ghor, but this has not spread successfully to either Panjab or Waras.

In at least three districts - Bamyan centre, Shibar and Yakawlang - potatoes are the predominant cash crop with many advantages and attractions over poppy. Potatoes are ideally suited to the climate and environment and also provide food security as well as income. Small plots of poppy have been observed in previous years on an experimental basis in most parts of the Hazarajat, but the results have not proved to be attractive for most small farmers for whom a crop failure risks hunger and serious deprivation during the winter and enforced migration.

5.6. Geographical coverage

The SALEH project originally intended to address problems in all central highland districts with a majority of Hazara population. However, a slow upstart due to problems in recruiting staff and security issues has meant that the project today operates only in four districts (see table below). These districts represent all the agro-ecological zones of Bamyan province. This is a good basis for acquiring diversified experience with regard to both community development and a range of technical agriculture-related issues.

Provinces	Planned districts	Actual districts
Bamyan	Bamyan Centre, Shibar, Yakawlang, Panjab and Waras	Shibar, Yakawlang, Panjab and Waras
Wardak	Hisa-i-Awali Bihsud (Bihsud 1) and Markazi Bihsud (Bihsud 2)	
Ghor	Lal wa Sar Jangal	

As already recommended (see section 5.2.1), with the project's manpower resources stretched to the limit, no geographical expansion should take place within the life of the present project. The project should consolidate work with the existing 68 FBOs and only allow for limited expansion to neighbouring communities on unsolicited requests – maybe to the level of around 75 FBOs. Such an expansion will require fewer resources from the project because farmer-to-farmer exchange is already taking place.

5.7. Project management

After initial severe problems in recruiting qualified staff for its team, the project has since beginning of project year 2 had sufficient staff to operate at full scale (see list of project staff

in Annex 12). However, certain technical skills came onboard only within the last year, which has meant that some technical interventions have been delayed (most notably related to potato production). Though the Hazarajat in general has remained a tranquil part of the country, during 2004 and 2005, further delays were encountered due to UN-imposed security restrictions during presidential and parliamentary elections, both occasions corresponding with harvest times, which are crucial times for the project to collect agricultural data.

The MTR team observed a well functioning project team with a commendable team spirit, good morale and commitment to their work. The management structure appears sound and effective with a cordial and frank relationship between the Chief Technical Adviser (CTA), Karim Merchant (the only non-Afghan on the team) and the rest of the team, and with the CTA personally involved in site implementation to a considerable degree. It was notable that the CTA was well known to the communities and government personnel in the districts visited. The project team also masters a high level of important networking with central and local authorities and other agencies, and it maintains a comprehensive and useful management information system (MIS) as an important basis for analysing project results and dissemination of experiences. This has greatly helped the work of the MTR team.

Recommendation: The project should consider the need to fill vacancies during the time remaining to the project. Some of these vacancies may be filled on a short-term basis, only.

The donor has played an important role in support of project management and implementation. With some level of autonomy, the DFID Kabul office has been flexible in its grant administration and they have been in a position to offer technical advice and support to SALEH, helping the project link with the other partners in the DFID portfolio and also raise profile of successes in various fora.

5.8. Coordination

As already mentioned, the project works in close coordination and cooperation with other FAO programmes such as the seed programme (GCP/AFG/018/EC), the nutrition project (GCP/AFG/039/GER), the irrigation programme (GCP/AFG/035/AFG), and the poultry project (GCP/AFG/030/USA). Affective coordination and cooperation also takes place with Department of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry and Food (DAAHF, the MAAHF's presence at provincial and district level) as well as with other agencies in the area, such as NGOs. In addition, the project is instrumental in provincial coordination meetings and sectoral working group meetings. It is the general impression of the MTR team that coordination and cooperation work in an exemplary manner. (See also recommendation in section 5.11 suggesting that FAO programme activities may be coordinated under the umbrella of SALEH.)

Some FBOs coincide with communities active in the NSP, but to date none of the other national priority programmes are being effectively implemented in the project area. Although there does not appear to be very close collaboration between NSP and SALEH, neither is there any serious clash of interest. FBOs have been established in such a way as to operate smoothly and in parallel with the NSP structures and this appears to be the case.

Relations with the New Zealand military PRT, which has its base in Bamyan centre and regularly patrols the province, appear to be friendly if distant. Apparently, relationships generally between the PRT and the civilian organisations, institutions and the local population that surround it vary considerably with the individual characters of changing commanding officers.

5.9. Project work plan

The MTR team discussed work plans for the coming period with project management. At present, these plans appear to be sound and realistic, but no doubt modified work plans will have to be developed to take into account the recommendations of this report (when endorsed by the concerned parties), not least, of course, the recommendation concerning a no-cost extension of the project period by 18 months (see section 5.10 below).

5.10. No-cost extension of pilot period

In agreement with observations made by previous consultants such as Barry Pound and reported in project progress reports, the MTR team notes the fact that the project has had an unavoidably slow beginning in 2003-2004 due to problems in finding qualified staff. During 2004 and 2005, further delays were encountered due to UN-imposed security restrictions during presidential and parliamentary elections. As a result, spending has been less than budgeted and sufficient funds remain in the project (see section 5.1 above) to extend the project period on a no-cost basis.

Recommendation: Provided there is no further substantial expansion, geographically or in terms of number of FBOs, the present pilot project phase should be extended on a no-cost basis by an additional eighteen months until the end of 2008. This will fit in with the agricultural seasons and allow the project to include the harvest season September-October 2008, when important lessons may be learned.

Recommendation: In connection with a possible no-cost extension of the project, the donor should continue its flexible administration of the grant and allow the project to reallocate funds between budget lines in order to set up a workable budget.

5.11. Scope for a second phase of the project

As already pointed out, rural development in such an environment as Hazarajat is bound to be slow, and developing community capacity and ownership of activities does not come quickly. As it can be anticipated that the project will achieve good results in its remaining phase, it is reasonable to consider a second phase utilising and expanding on the experiences and results of the first phase.

Recommendation: Serious consideration should be given to following up the present pilot project with a second phase of four to five years in which the role of the government would continue to be strengthened. If such a second phase is agreed and donor(s) found to support the idea, activities should be scaled up and the geographical coverage expanded to include districts with substantial Hazara population not covered in the first phase (e.g. Bamyán Centre and districts in neighbouring Ghor and Wardak province) as suggested in the original Project Document. In this connection, it should also be considered to establish a second project office in, for instance, Panjab to facilitate communication and more easy access to new areas south of the Koh-e-Babar range.

Recommendation: Should a second phase of the project be approved and funded, the further development of project concepts, particularly related to the role of the FBOs, should be considered, promoting the development towards more formalised institutions at community level. This should be closely related to the experience gained from the NSP concerning the establishment of formalised and sustainable institutions at community level.

Recommendation: In connection with a possible second phase of the project in which the role of the government will continue to be strengthened, it should be considered (in the Hazarajat) to coordinate more activities under the umbrella of SALEH so that it may change its status from being a project to becoming a programme.

6. ACHIEVEMENTS

6.1. Effects and impacts

It is a reality that the pace of rural development in a remote and mountainous region such as the Hazarajat is slow. Furthermore, results of a project of SALEH's nature, with emphasis on the development of community capacity and community ownership of activities, do not come quickly. In spite of that, and delays due to staff recruitment problems and security lockdowns, the project has now established 68 FBOs and 56 CBM&E cells, which is considered close to the maximum that can be handled with the given resources, and the number of technical interventions started with the FBOs appears acceptable under the circumstances.

The MTR team is not in doubt that the project is well on the way to achieve good results with regard to project concept and approach, but it remains a problem, however, that many of the activities (typically the nurseries) will not show tangible results until the very end of the present project period. It may therefore be difficult to gain the necessary experience and analyse the results of some interventions within the lifetime of the project as currently defined. Reference is therefore made to the recommendations on a no-cost extension (see section 5.10) and a second phase of the project (see section 5.11). Attention is also drawn to the recommendation on a study of experiences and lessons learned to be undertaken by the appropriate department(s) of the FAO headquarters in Rome in collaboration with the GOA (section 5.2.3).

6.2. Sustainability

An understanding of sustainability always requires some qualification, and even well developed economies and systems require support and service systems to be in place in order to survive and thrive. *'No man is an island'*, as the saying goes.

As far as can be observed at this point in the project's development, the concept of the FBO as its socio-economic base appears to be sound with every chance of proving to be sustainable, based as it is on existing traditional social systems and natural interest groups. Over time, the project must help to strengthen this and help it to function more effectively in its ability to connect with sources of outside resources and inputs and linkages with markets and in time, and if appropriate, establish a more formal institutional framework. This is an ongoing process that will continue throughout the life of this project and through a second phase.

The activities in which the project is involved combine a strong element of capacity building at all levels, which are at the core of sustainability, with comparatively simple technical introductions and innovations. These are well within the technical capacity of the agricultural communities to absorb. There will always be a need for continuous technical and service support in certain areas such as the availability of sources of good quality seed of up-to-date and appropriate varieties, and appropriate technical advice and services supporting vaccination and livestock health programmes. Such services should have a value and a price in order to avoid the creation of dependency, except in instances of dire necessity.

As far as can be predicted at this stage, the SALEH project has been established on a sound basis for future sustainability within the limitations that always surround a time-bound project

such as that of the SALEH project and in circumstances such as exist in Afghanistan, both political, social and physical.

6.3. Gender and development

The issue of gender and development is particularly sensitive in Afghanistan where large parts of the traditional society practise seclusion of women from public life. In some places it is possible to involve or address women if this is done in separate programmes exclusively for and by women. Fortunately, in Hazarajat the attitude towards the issue of women and development is more relaxed than in most other parts of the country. This means that the SALEH project is able to involve women more directly in various activities such as the literacy and agricultural training programme. More is needed, however, and the project has therefore developed an interesting concept note on a Women's Empowerment Programme, focusing on literacy and income generation training, which they hope will become part of SALEH in the remaining (extended) period of the project. It is noted that already the New Zealand Aid agency NZAID has expressed an interest in funding this programme.

6.4. Environmental impacts

In the observation of the MTR team, the SALEH project is not engaged in or supporting activities that may adversely affect the natural environment. Certain improved practices such as the planting of fruit trees, encouragement of good farming practices, the cultivation of legumes and the planting of fruit tree orchards and bee-keeping are, if anything, beneficial to the environment. As are simple engineering works that improve irrigation, control floods etc.

The project should, however, consider strengthening its technical capability in understanding traditional cropping systems, their positive as well as their negative aspects in order to see where and how best practice can be supported. Traditional cropping systems have been developed over hundreds of years in very adverse conditions, are part of the local populations coping mechanisms and should not be dismissed out of hand without understanding. In view of the seriousness of pasture degradation in many places, and highlighted in many FBO CAPs, the project needs to seriously consider increasing its understanding and technical capability in this issue. This is a complex issue caused as much as anything by inappropriate dry-land cultivation and the destructive gathering of woody plants for fuel as much as by inappropriate herding practices. It may not be possible for the project to have much impact in helping to improve the situation during this first phase of the project but much can be done during the next two years to prepare the way for a more significant input in a second phase if approved.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The SALEH project is based on a concept that places strong emphasis on a bottom-up approach and underlines the importance of community management and ownership of interventions. The main focus is on formation and running of farmer-based organisations (FBOs) as local institutions serving as pivot for all activities, and on development of community action plans (CAPs) as expressions of genuine local problems and interests. With this strong emphasis on community decision making and ownership of activities, the project is testing approaches to the development of rural communities, not usually applied by FAO in Afghanistan, but with a success (so far) that merits further analysis with the view to replicating the approach in other interventions by FAO and others.

At this stage in the project's life, making due allowance for un-avoidable delays in its early stages and assuming that there will be a no-cost extension of 18 months (as recommended by the MTR team), the MTR team consider that the SALEH project is well established on a

sound community base, which appears to have a good chance of being sustainable as its fits in well with local social systems and natural interest groups. With the present number of 68 FBOs having been established, with a matching number of CAPs, and with the formation of 56 community based monitoring and evaluation (CBM&E) units, it is considered that the project in this respect has embraced as much as can be handled with the given resources. The project should therefore at this stage not attempt any major expansion in terms of the number of FBOs but rather consolidate work with existing groups.

The project is assisting a set of comparatively simple ongoing activities identified by the FBO CAPs. The communities appear to accept ownership of these activities at this stage, but the activities will require technical advice and support throughout the present life of the project. The activities can be developed and expanded and new activities supported as and when identified over the next two years and, it is hoped, into an expanded second phase.

The technically linked adult literacy courses for men and significantly for women have proved to be a most significant activity that was not envisaged in the project document. In all the seven FBOs visited by the MTR team, the importance of these courses was emphasised by the villagers. Significantly, these literacy courses are already giving rise to additional and reasonable demands for vocational training. The project is fortunate in this respect to be operating in an area of Hazara culture that is more tolerant towards women's direct and open involvement in social and economic life of the community that in most other parts of the country. This, and the general emphasis that the project is placing on training and human and institutional development (in the broadest sense), will be its greatest insurance for the sustainability that is one of its core objectives.

Although it is too early in the projects active life to make any final assessments, it should not be overlooked that this is essentially a pilot project from which lessons must be learned and experiences recorded and analysed and if possible and appropriate expanded both within the Hazarajat and beyond. Project management is in the process of actively setting up an information system to support this critical analysis of project achievements.

As with any project that is actively involved, the SALEH project will constantly require fine-tuning and improvements both in management and in its technical content and application. At this stage the project appears to be on the right tracks and pointing in the right direction.