



“From Bad They Made It Worse”

*The concentration of opium poppy in areas of conflict
in the provinces of Helmand and Nangarhar*

David Mansfield

May 2014



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Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

Case Study

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About the Author

David Mansfield is an independent consultant who has undertaken fieldwork on the role of opium poppy in rural livelihoods in Afghanistan for 18 consecutive growing seasons.

About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

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David Mansfield

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Acronyms

AGES	Anti-government elements
ALP	Afghan Local Police
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
ISAF	International Security Assistance Forces
Kg	Kilograms
MCN	Ministry of Counter Narcotics
MP	Member of Parliament
OSDR	Organisation of Sustainable Development and Research
PR	Pakistani Rupees (used with much more frequency than the Afghani in the southern and eastern provinces). At the time of this research, US\$1.00 was roughly equivalent to PR 99.5 PR.
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Glossary

Angreze	British
arbaki	a tribally mobilised community police force in southeastern Afghanistan
badar	a slave owner
badmaash	a goon
barma	deep wells
bawre	shallow wells
beighairat	without honor
chaprasi	the equivalent of an attendant or janitor at a school
charak	1.125 kg, (equivalent of one quarter of a man)
chawarki	authority or government
darbadar	a beggar who goes door-to-door
dasht	adesert
daw-i-pashli dah)	spraying of “medicine” on crops
dowus	someone who allows the women of his household to behave without honour or shame
jawzai	maize
jerib	roughly one-fifth of a hectare
Jihadist	a former fighter against the Soviets
kafir	a non-Muslim
kalay	a village
karez	an irrigated area
khairat	charity
khan	achief
khel	asub-tribe
khord	equivalent to 112.5 g
kosai	a prostitute
landi	dried lamb meat
lekha	a financial arrangement between a sharecropper and farm owner
madrassah	religious school
malik	a village representative
man	equivalent to 4.5 kg
mandas	dried river washes
manteqa	a cluster of several villages or settlements
maraz	disease
mela	market
mullah	preacher at the mosque
murdagow	a man who sells women for sex
naqel	settlers who are not indigenous to Helmand (literally “chosen”)
patoo	atraditional Afghan shawl
paw	430 grams
qala	a compound, small group of households
qatoo	the equivalent of 25-50 grams
salaam	advance payment on the future opium crop
seer	a unit of weight, roughly equal to seven kilogrammes in Kabul and 1.2 kilogrammes in the East
shagai	a rocky area
shaitan	devils
spinghiri	elders
ushr	traditionally an agricultural tithe paid to the mullah forhis services to the community; often used as a generic term fortaxation
wakil	a village representative

waliswal	adistrict governor
wolesijirga	the lower house of Parliament

Other relevant terms

Afghani (Afs)	Afghan unit of currency. During this research, US\$1.00 was worth approximately 55.5Afs.
farmgate	the price for the sale of produce directly from the farmer
hectare	roughly 10,000 square metres
monocropping	growing a single crop year after year on the same land
sharecropper	a farmer who cultivates another farmer's land in return for a share of the final yield
tubewell	a deep water well in which a steel tube or pipe is bored into an underground aquifer.

“From Bad They Made it Worse”¹ : The concentration of opium poppy in areas of conflict

Executive Summary

Levels of drug crop cultivation have long been seen as an indicator of the success or failure of counternarcotics efforts. However, to rely on this indicator is to misunderstand the socioeconomic and political processes that support farmers moving out of opium poppy cultivation, as well as the limited scope of many interventions currently categorized and budgeted as “counternarcotics” by the international community and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA).

Evidence in Helmand and Nangarhar shows that farmers in Afghanistan can and do move out of opium poppy cultivation when conditions allow.² But the motivation for this transition cannot simply be attributed to the interventions currently understood as “counternarcotics”: the provision of agricultural inputs such as wheat seed and fertiliser, the threat of eradication, and the dissemination of information on the legal and social implications of opium production. In fact, there are more fundamental socioeconomic and political processes at work supporting farmers’ move from a portfolio of activities in which opium poppy has a critical and multifunctional role to a position where the household’s wellbeing does not depend on opium production.

Moreover, contrary to some prevailing narratives, the evidence shows that some farmers who have abandoned opium poppy have neither experienced a significant loss in welfare nor looked to engage in violent resistance to the Afghan state. These farmers are typically located near the provincial centre and have non-farm income opportunities. They have better access to education and health services than they did in the past. They have improved market access because both road construction and improved security in the area have reduced the time and costs associated with travel and made it easier for public and private sectors to function. They also have a more physically secure environment and are making different and longer-term investment decisions than they once did.

Under these circumstances, the provision of basic agricultural inputs such as wheat seed and fertiliser has made little difference in these communities, given the uptake in high-value horticultural crops and a growing reliance on non-farm income opportunities. Although these farmers were persuaded and coerced to abandon opium production and their closeness to the provincial capital made it seem likely that they would be subject to crop eradication, their crops were rarely destroyed.

In fact, no single project or intervention has supported these farmers in the transition out of opium poppy cultivation. That decision reflects a combination of factors within a wider process of change that has been supported, and in some cases initiated, by significant investments in the rural economy over the last decade.

This study, however, does not focus on the rural communities in this more privileged position; instead, it concentrates on the population where the conditions to make a transition out of opium poppy are not in place, and in some cases never have been. It looks at how those who are most dependent on opium poppy have adapted and responded not just to counternarcotics efforts but to the wider state-building project in Afghanistan and the exogenous shocks that their communities have been exposed to. It shows that the relationship between conflict, insecurity and opium production in rural Afghanistan is not inevitable, as is often suggested in the literature of drug control organisations such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Rather, it demonstrates how this relationship is shaped by state responses to opium production and the kind of economic insecurity the rural population is exposed to by these and other government policies.

1 This title is translated from the Pashto expression “de bado na yee badtar ker,” a reference to the deteriorating situation in the areas covered by this research.

2 David Mansfield, “All Bets are Off: Prospects for (B)reaching Agreements and Drug control in Helmand in the run up to Transition” (Kabul: AREU, 2013); David Mansfield and Paul Fishstein, “Eyes Wide Shut: CN in Transition” Briefing Paper, (Kabul: AREU, 2013).

This study explores the relationship between drugs and insecurity by drawing on in-depth research in two geographic areas where opium poppy and insurgency have become concentrated over the last few years: the southern districts of Nangarhar and the area north of the Boghra Canal in Helmand. By 2013 both of these areas had almost monocropped opium—growing it year after year on the same land and leaving little land even for staple food crops—but they have very different histories. The southern districts of Nangarhar have a long history of opium poppy cultivation but had largely abandoned opium production between 2008 and 2010. The area north of the Boghra Canal was largely desert until the Karzai administration was formed in 2002, with less than a thousand hectares of agricultural land and a small population that had settled there to escape the drought in Washir and Nawzad to the north.

Anti-Government Elements (AGEs), often referred to generically as the Taliban, were “in residence” in both areas, but under markedly different circumstances. In Achin, Nangarhar, they had been actively resisted by the local population until late 2010; by contrast, in the former desert area of Helmand the population had been sparse until 2008, largely made up of farmers who owed their land, and to some extent their fealty to politico-military actors linked to the provincial administration of the former Governor Sher Mohammed Akhundzada.

In both Nangarhar and Helmand, the study shows that counternarcotics efforts directed at population groups with limited resource endowments and no viable alternatives to opium poppy may deliver short-term reductions in cultivation. But the question is, at what cost? Empirical evidence suggests that precipitous drops in poppy cultivation in both areas have led to growing economic insecurity for particular population groups. In Nangarhar, the population that has suffered most from the effective ban on opium production has been concentrated in the southern districts where land holdings are small, population densities are high, and non-farm income opportunities are limited. These are also areas where the state does not have a history of direct rule and where state-societal relations have always been weak. In contrast, in Helmand, a ban that has been extended across the canal command area since it was announced by then Governor Gulab Mangal has had the greatest impact on the land-poor, who often experienced profound economic distress.

With few economic opportunities and little assistance targeted directly at the land-poor, these populations have adapted to prohibition in the only way they know how. In the southern districts of Nangarhar the farmers have returned to opium poppy cultivation in large numbers, evicting the state security infrastructure from the upper and lower valleys and thereby providing a staging ground for penetration of AGEs into the Kabul valley. The dramatic change in the security situation in Nangarhar in 2013, with a state that now finds itself negotiating with communities to gain access and destroy even a small amount of opium poppy, could not be in greater contrast to the appearance of state power that was projected across the province in 2008 by then Governor Gul Aga Shirzai and the US military that supported him.

In Helmand, the land-poor have relocated north of the Boghra Canal and rejected the state, working the land as sharecroppers and tenant farmers and monocropping opium poppy in the hope that they might be able to buy a piece of land where they can grow the crop “protected” by the Taliban. Even in the face of particularly low yields in 2013 that made poppy cultivation unprofitable for many, the settler communities seem resigned to staying in the desert. Those who have recently acquired land stay because the desert is now their home and they have nowhere else to go, while those who sharecrop stay because there is still no land or home for them in the canal command area as long as an effective ban on opium poppy is imposed. The economic challenges caused by these low yields and the belief that the state and its foreign sponsors are responsible for the disease that has damaged the crop only harden support for AGEs and antipathy towards the government.

This study shows that it is not appropriate to dismiss opium poppy cultivation as a function of the actions of insurgents and the diminishing coercive power of the state. The areas in which opium poppy cultivation has become concentrated in these provinces cannot be easily labeled as insurgent or Taliban controlled. Instead the research reveals a complex, hybrid and evolving political terrain, dense with local groups. It shows a population that has increasingly shaped

the balance of coercive power in their favour: farmers who are benefiting from employment in the public sector and government services such as health and education, while at the same supporting and establishing the kind of “disorder” in which opium poppy cultivation can thrive.

Thus, rather than automatically treating poppy cultivation as a function of the insurgency in Afghanistan, it is important to look to the particular conditions under which a ban is imposed, consider what impact it will have on the welfare of sections of the population, and reflect on whether a ban might, in fact, help establish the conditions for increasing conflict and insurgency in some parts of the country. This study does not advocate doing nothing at all in the opium poppy-producing areas of Afghanistan; many of those cultivating poppy can hardly be considered wealthy and are obvious targets for development assistance. Rather, the evidence from these two areas argues for carefully considering the range of possible effects of a successful ban across the different socioeconomic groups involved in opium poppy cultivation.

It is all too common to hear members of the development community state that “to do something is always better than doing nothing at all.” This study shows that this is just not the case.

1. Introduction

The headlines for the 2012-13 growing season in Afghanistan described dramatic increases in the cultivation of opium poppy. Nationally, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported a 36 percent increase in the amount of land allocated to opium poppy between 2012 and 2013 and a further reduction in the number of provinces declared “poppy free.”³ This latest rise in cultivation followed the increases in cultivation reported in 2009-10 and 2010-11. Consequently, in only four years, poppy cultivation in Afghanistan rose from 123,000 hectares in 2009-10 to 209,000 hectares in 2014, and it has almost trebled since the first year of the Karzai regime in 2001-02 when cultivation stood at only 74,000 hectares.⁴

The increase in cultivation is all the more pronounced in many of the provinces where poppy cultivation has been concentrated over the last three decades. The provinces of Nangarhar and Helmand stand out in particular, given the reductions in cultivation that were achieved over the last five years. Both provinces have been the targets of considerable international investment and are cited as examples of successful counternarcotics efforts. Yet, in Nangarhar, poppy cultivation rose by an estimated 399 percent between the 2011-12 and 2012-13 growing seasons, increasing from 3,151 to 15,719 hectares⁵ in only twelve months: a far cry from the province’s poppy-free status in 2008. After a downward trajectory between 2008-09 and 2010-11, levels of poppy cultivation in Helmand also increased significantly between the 2011-12 and 2012-13 growing seasons. With UNODC estimating cultivation at 100,693 hectares in 2012-13, up from 75,176 hectares in 2011-12 and 63,307 in 2010-11, cultivation had risen 59 percent in two years and had returned to levels commensurate with those at the beginning of the Food Zone initiative, a counternarcotics campaign launched by Governor Gulab Mangal at the end of 2008 with UK and US assistance.

Some might view these figures and argue that they demonstrate that efforts to reduce opium production in Afghanistan—as seen in these two provinces are failing. Others might consider this a simplistic narrative that does not adequately capture the relationship between drug crop cultivation and the wider state-building effort in Afghanistan. After all if reductions in drug crop cultivation require economic growth, improved governance and better security to coalesce within a specific area, what does rising cultivation tell us about efforts to deliver across other stands of activity in Afghanistan?

Indeed, beneath the headline figures in both Nangarhar and Helmand, as well as in other provinces, one finds quite different patterns of opium poppy cultivation at the local and district levels. Dramatic increases in cultivation in some areas stand in contrast to negligible—or even falling—levels of production in others. Far more important than the rise in the metrics that are often used to denote the success or failure of the counternarcotics effort are the socioeconomic and political processes that lie behind the changes in cultivation; these factors have a great deal to tell us about the nature of the current Afghan state-building effort, counterinsurgency and the transition away from the cultivation of opium poppy.

3 The term “poppy-free province” was introduced in 2008 by UNODC. It refers to a province that cultivates less than 100 hectares of opium poppy. In 2013 the provinces of Balkh and Faryab which were formerly poppy-free were found to be cultivating more than 100 hectares, resulting in a decrease from 17 to 15 provinces being declared poppy-free.

4 Of course cultivation in the 2000-01 growing season—the last year of the Taliban regime—stood at only 8,000 hectares, but this was an anomaly for Afghanistan. Moreover, it can be argued that the economic outcomes of the ban made it far easier for western military forces and the Afghan opposition to gain the support of the rural population in their campaign to oust the Taliban in late 2001.

5 The United States Government also produces estimates of the amount of opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan each year. US Government estimates for Nangarhar in 2013 were 14,000 hectares, up from 4,400 hectares in 2012. In Helmand, the US Government reported a smaller rise than UNODC: from 90,500 hectares in 2012 to 95,500 hectares in 2013. This report cites the UNODC figures, since they are the figures the Afghan Government uses.

This study examines the causes of the shifts in levels of cultivation in these two provinces during the 2012-13 growing season. It asks why cultivation has become concentrated in areas where the insurgency appears to dominate. It moves beyond the simplistic explanations of changes in cultivation that dominate much of the drug control literature, where production is viewed as primarily a function of the farmgate price (the price at which a product is sold at the farm, directly from the farmer and without separate transport or delivery charges) and the threat of eradication.⁶ Instead, the study locates cultivation within the dynamic socioeconomic, political and environmental terrain in which opium poppy is actually grown. To do this, it focuses on two parts of the provinces of Nangarhar and Helmand. In the case of Nangarhar, the districts of interest are the southern districts bordering Pakistan, most notably the districts of Achin and Khogiani, and also the pivotal district of Shinwar located on the main highway between Jalalabad and Torkham. In Helmand, the study focuses on the former desert area north of the Boghra Canal, an area that has seen dramatic changes over the last few years.

Following this introduction (Section 1), the second section presents the methodological approach. The third section examines the causes of the rapid increase in cultivation in the southern districts of Nangarhar in the 2012-13 growing season and how these factors relate to the growing AGE presence in these areas. The fourth section explores the expansion in settlement north of the Boghra Canal in Helmand: the physical, economic, social, and political transformation of what was until a few years ago just desert land. It explains how this change has been shaped by events in the canal command area, particularly the counternarcotics effort known as the Food Zone. And the last section offers a conclusion.

6 UNODC/MCN Afghanistan Opium Survey 2013 (Kabul: UNODC/MCN (2013), 50-51.

2. Methodology

This report covers fieldwork undertaken in the provinces of Nangarhar and Helmand during the opium harvest season of 2013. Both provinces have been significant producers of opium, and the focus of considerable counternarcotics and development activity, making them useful sites for comparative research. Fieldwork was primarily undertaken by colleagues from the Organisation of Sustainable Development and Research (OSDR). The focus of the fieldwork was on rural households and what changes they experienced in their lives and livelihoods over the preceding twelve months.

This fieldwork builds on a much larger body of research that the author and OSDR have undertaken during the harvest seasons in Nangarhar since 2005 and in Helmand since 2008. It also follows research conducted during each winter planting season in both of these provinces dating back to 2002. This report does not aim to synthesise this large body of accumulated data. Instead, it provides an account of the socioeconomic, political, and environmental developments that have affected households in the 2012-13 growing season and how these have impacted household livelihoods, including their decision to cultivate opium poppy.

The research approaches opium poppy as one crop within a wider range of household activities. This approach recognises that simply asking households why they do or do not cultivate opium is insufficient, since the complex and interconnected factors that inform household decision making cannot be distilled into a single answer. Interviewers also avoided asking direct questions about opium in order to reduce the risk of households exaggerating their returns on opium as a way to “negotiate” for greater development assistance in return for giving up the crop. Extensive experience with interviewing has shown that where opium poppy is cultivated, respondents typically will include it when recounting the different crops that they grow and sell. The fact that interviews were conducted in the field during the planting and harvest season for the winter crops, including opium poppy, allowed fieldworkers to verify—and where necessary, challenge—the truth of respondents’ answers.

The research also addresses the inherent problems associated with primary data collection when researching an “illegal” or “underground” activity by focusing the enquiry on household livelihood strategies. The pressure to act against opium cultivation and trade has made illicit drugs a more sensitive topic for discussion with farmers and other stakeholders than was the case in the 1990s and early 2000s. However, the rural household remains the most accessible unit of analysis when looking at the opium economy in Afghanistan; it offers a basis for cross-referencing findings with other research on rural livelihoods in Afghanistan, and on the role of opium production in rural livelihood strategies in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Discussions also focused on the direct experience of respondents and their households rather than on a wider geographic area, where answers become increasingly speculative.⁷ Individual interviews with farming households were conducted in the field as farmers tended their crops, since holding interviews in the household compound can attract attention from others and become subject to repeated interruptions and biases. Group discussions with farmers were avoided, as they tend to be dominated by community elites, are inappropriate for discussing sensitive issues, and increasingly represent a security threat in rural Helmand.⁸

In total, 115 interviews were conducted in Nangarhar in April 2013. They included 98 rural households in five districts: Achin, Kama, Khogiani, Shinwar, and Surkhrud in Nangarhar Province (see Figure 1). Interviews were also conducted with shopkeepers and daily wage labourers in the provincial centre of Jalalabad, Kahi Bazaar in Achin, and the town of Markoh located on the Torkham road in Shinwar District (n15). Two more household interviews were conducted in Jani

7 Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, “Farming Systems of Nad Ali District, Helmand Province,” in *Agricultural Survey of Afghanistan*, Report 15 (Peshawar: SCA, 1992), 1.

8 Ira Moore Stevens and K. Tarzi, “Economics of Agricultural Production in Helmand Valley, Afghanistan” (Washington, DC: United States Department of the Interior Bureau of Reclamation, 1965), 1; Jonathan Goodhand, “Research in Zones of Violent Conflict” (Manchester: Chronic Poverty Research Centre, 2001 [unpublished]), 13; Frydoon Shairzai, Ghulam Farouq and Richard Scott, “Farm Economic Survey of the Helmand Valley” (Kabul: USAID, 1975 [unpublished]), 13.

Khel in Bati Kot District, an area close to the bazaars of Markoh and Ghani Khel that has seen increasing levels of agricultural diversification over the last five years.

For the first time since this research began, fieldwork in the upper valleys of Achin and Khogiani had to be conducted by researchers who came from the valleys of interest. In the past, researchers from other parts of the province had been able to conduct fieldwork in these areas, but once Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) consolidated their presence, it became impossible to work in Wazir and even the lower parts of the Mahmand valley without local researchers.

Research in Helmand in 2013 focused on the desert area north of the Boghra Canal. Fieldwork was conducted at eight research sites in this area. Two of these sites were the locations for repeated fieldwork since May 2008, while the other six sites became focal points for the research in 2011 and 2012 following the realisation that there had been, and continued to be, rapid expansion in the amount of land coming under agricultural production in this area (see Figure 2).⁹ As with the fieldwork in Nangarhar, interviews were conducted with traders and shopkeepers, as well as with those looking for daily wage labour in the main bazaars. In total, 105 interviews were conducted in the former desert area in April and May 2013.

2.1 Caveats

Research in Afghanistan is always subject to biases. This is even more the case in a chronically insecure environment such as that found in Helmand and the southern districts of Nangarhar. The paucity of reliable demographic data hinders establishing a representative sample in such areas; both fieldworkers and respondents have legitimate concerns for their own safety (particularly in rural areas); and it is difficult to provide oversight for data collection in the field. The research methodology outlined above is designed to address these challenges, but a number of caveats must be noted, given the security environment in both Helmand and Nangarhar and the types of sensitive issues the study raises.

The most important caveat relates to the impact of the conflict on fieldwork. Insecurity in both provinces limited the geographical coverage of fieldwork (often at short notice), ruled out formal structured interviews in insecure rural areas, and made central Helmand and the southern districts of Nangarhar difficult environments for field research. While a focused research design and a team of experienced local staff facilitated fieldwork in areas exposed to ongoing conflict, results were inevitably shaped by the prevailing security situation. For example, fieldwork in the upper part of the Mahmand valley in Achin proved impossible in light of the presence of armed groups in these valleys and warnings from local villagers.

It is also worth noting that the security situation in Helmand prevented repeat visits to the same households during successive rounds of fieldwork. Repeated visits to the same households every six months would arouse suspicion from AGEs and their supporters, and would put both fieldworkers and respondents at risk. In the areas north of the Boghra Canal, fieldworkers had to work with existing contacts at a research site as well as to establish new contacts without alerting those in the wider community of their work as researchers.

Fieldworkers had to be discreet, interviewing individual farmers at work in their fields where there were no bystanders and an outsider would not be as conspicuous. They did not take notes during interviews but wrote up the interviews after they parted company from the respondents. While this approach presented some challenges with regard to recall or memory bias, these risks were reduced by the high level of experience of the fieldworkers. The less formal and more conversational style of the interviews also reduced the potential for “social desirability bias”¹⁰ that has been shown to affect the results of such quantitative techniques as polling in chronically insecure areas.¹¹

9 David Mansfield, Alcis Ltd and OSD, “Managing Concurrent and Repeated Risks: Explaining the Reductions in Opium Production in Central Helmand between 2008 and 2011” (Kabul: AREU, 2011).

10 The tendency of respondents to reply in a manner that will be viewed favorably by others.

11 DFID Afghanistan, “Data Quality Assessment of the Asia Foundation Surveys of the Afghan People, 2006-2009” (Unpublished report, September 2010).

The research does not claim to cover a representative sample of households or communities in either province, as this is unattainable in the current environment. Instead, it draws on household livelihood trajectories and geospatial data collected over an extended period of time in a number of specific and quite different research sites. By merging detailed and historical household, local and geospatial data across such diverse areas, it is hoped that this research will produce what R. Yin has referred to as “analytic generalisation,”¹² offering findings that are relevant to other parts of Afghanistan.

12 Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (London: Sage, 1994), 31.

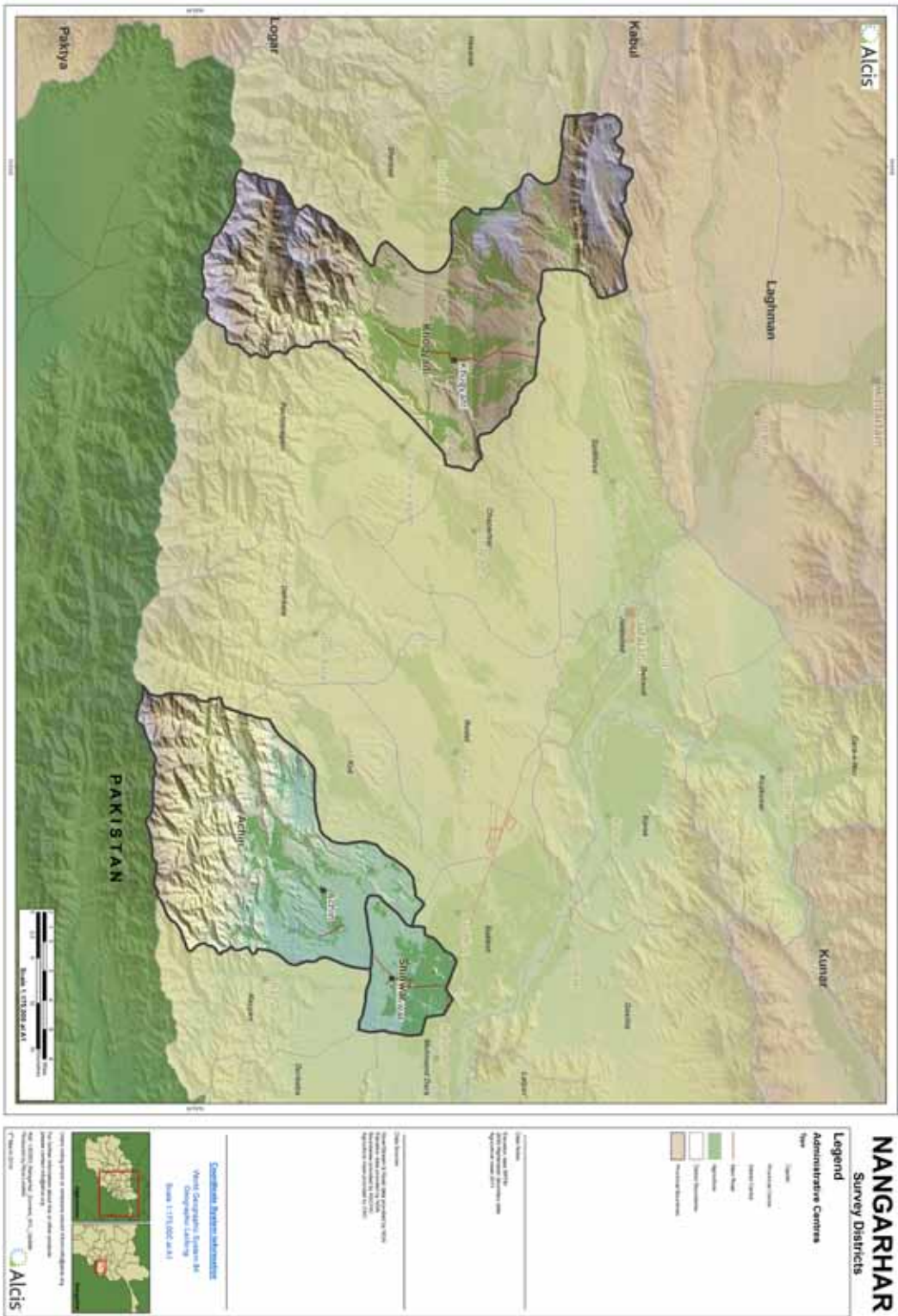
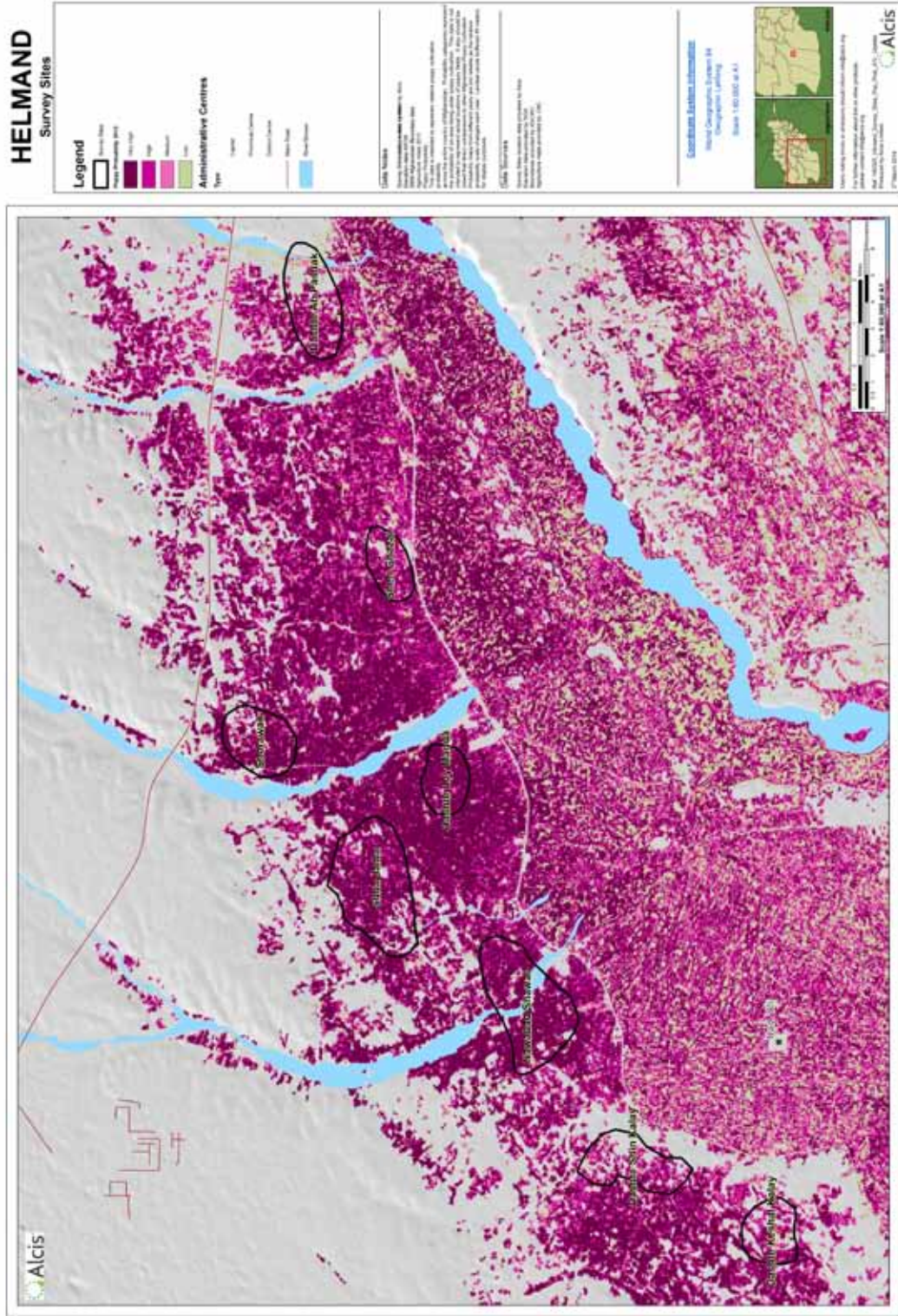


Figure 1 : Research Areas in Nangarhar Province

Figure 2: Research Areas in Helmand Province



3. Nangarhar: The dispersal of political power

3.1 Introduction to the situation in Nangarhar

The political and security situation in Nangarhar deteriorated dramatically between 2012 and 2013 as the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) and its security forces found themselves under growing political and military pressure within the province. This pressure did not exist only in the upper reaches of the districts bordering Pakistan, as had been the case since 2010. It also began to be felt in areas far closer to the provincial centre: areas located in the Kabul river valley where the Afghan Government has traditionally dominated. Attacks on Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) convoys increased dramatically on the main highway in Bati Kot; the district of Chapahar, located only six kilometers from Jalalabad, also became an increasingly contested space; and even the bazaar town of Markoh on the Torkham-to-Jalalabad highway became an area where AGEs were active, staging regular attacks on government forces and raising funds from local mosques and traders.

It would, however, be an error to simply equate the worsening security situation to the loss of territory to the Taliban or those that oppose the current Afghan Government. Instead, an increasingly factionalised and fluid environment emerged in Nangarhar in 2013 as the United States military withdrew and a multiplicity of local, subnational and even regional political actors sought to gain territorial ground, control over resources, and influence over the rural population in different parts of the province. Labels such as “the Taliban” or “the government” became all the more meaningless as ways of denoting the affiliation and loyalties of those involved in the myriad conflicts occurring within the province.

Those who purportedly sided with the government continued their competition for control of state institutions and the resources and patronage these institutions provided. The rivalry between the provincial political elite and then Governor Gul Aga Shirzai continued, further undermining confidence in the GIROA among the rural population. Until 2013, the campaign to remove Shirzai and shore up political power in the province by the former *jihadi* elite and their scions had taken many forms, including numerous accusations of corruption and incompetence in public forums and the media, as well as direct appeals to the President to dismiss the Governor.¹³

The efforts to remove the Governor took on a more populist style when Haji Zahir—a standing Member of Parliament, former Deputy Speaker and prominent member of the Arsala family—organised a roadblock on the major arterial roads in and out of Jalalabad, to demand that Governor, Gul Aga Shirzai, be deposed. This campaign proved effective in stopping traffic entering and departing the city on the first day of protest, but is soon petered out as those organising it found it increasingly difficult to muster sufficient local support to man the blockades, despite reports that money was paid to those who participated.

During fieldwork for this study, many rural respondents looked upon this protest in disbelief and further evidence of the self-interest of the Nangarhari political elite. (See Box 1 for the perspective of a respondent from Kama.)

¹³ The campaign by a cohort of the former jihadi elite and their scions to have Governor Gul Aga Shirzai replaced is documented in Mansfield, “All Bets Are Off.”

Box 1: Rounding up Supporters

My cousin is the *malik* [village representative] in the village. He telephoned me and said, "Please come to Jalalabad; we will remove the pimp [Gul Aga Shirzai]." I asked, "Why? What is wrong with him?" He told me, "Gul Aga is a thief." I asked him, "How is it possible that he is now a thief? For the last several years he has been in Jalalabad and you supported him. Why is it that today he is a thief when yesterday he was not?" I told him that when we were in Pakistan there were rations that were distributed to refugees. For each [refugee] camp there was a commander and there was also a *malik*. The *malik* shared in the looting of the [rationed] items with the commander. They kept many of the items themselves and sold them in the bazaar. Then one time the commander argued with the *malik* and said he would not give any of the items to him. The commander loaded the items in a truck and took them to the market, and the *malik* remained without any benefit. At the time the *malik* complained to the people; he told them that the commander had looted their food items, that it was their right to receive these things, and he said that they should protest. The people said, "You are right, but this has been the case for many years and now that you do not get a share [in the benefit] from the commander you say it is our right to these things and that we should do something. No, this is not right." I said to my cousin, "This is the same situation now. Today Gul Aga has not given you a share in his benefits and you want the people to protest. You receive another source of cash [from Haji Zahir] and now you say you are opposed to Shirzai and want us to stand in the road!"

Moreover, the central government's failure to respond to the closure of the main highway from the eastern border to Kabul reinforced the view that the political future of Nangarhar was not a priority for the Karzai administration. It gave extra weight to the more cynical argument that the conflict between Sherzai and Haji Zahir was advantageous, on the grounds that as long as these individuals were fighting each other they had less time to allocate to undermining the President's interests in both Kabul and Kandahar.

In parallel with the continued efforts to unseat the Governor were growing rumours of regional governments increasing their patronage to subnational and local elites, to ensure that those groups that their regional rivals supported did not gain political and territorial ascendancy in the run-up to transition and afterwards. For instance, locally there were claims that the Government of India was providing financial support for Haji Zahir Qadir and Hazrat Ali, both vehement opponents of then Governor Gul Aga Shirzai, who has a long relationship with elements of the Government of Pakistan.¹⁴ In Achin it was claimed that the Government of India, along with the National Directorate for Security and US Government, gave financial and military support to the Pakistani militant Mangal Bagh¹⁵ in his cross-border incursions from the southern district of Achin into Pakistan, as detailed in Section 3.2. In contrast, it was alleged that Pakistan-supported Taliban groups were behind the attack on the Indian Consulate in Jalalabad on 3 August 2013.¹⁶ Claims of cross-border support for Afghan insurgent groups in the southern districts also persisted, bolstered by reports of Waziri militants in the mountainous villages of Khogiani and Sherzad.

While the accuracy of these rumours was all but impossible to verify, their currency within the rural population highlighted the degree to which many believed that the province was fragmenting and becoming a political battleground for local and provincial actors, with support among regional and international powers. The persistence of the rumours was also indicative of a growing sense of political uncertainty and instability that permeated many of the areas of Nangarhar in which the research took place in 2013.

Respondents also spoke of the diffuse nature of AGEs within the province. While generic references to "the Taliban" persisted when respondents referred to armed groups in opposition to the government, it was quite clear that myriad groups were included under this label. The most simple typologies of AGEs would include "Islami Emirate Taliban" (under the leadership of Mullah Omar and the Quetta Shura; "Mahaz Taliban"¹⁷ (under the leadership of Haji Najibullah); the Tora Bora Military Mahaz (led by Anwar Al Haj Mujahid); and the "Pakistani Taliban" (under the leadership of Mangal Bagh). There were also reports of armed groups loyal to Hezi Islami (Hekmatyar) operating

14 Zulfiqar Shazada, "Altered States," Newline, January 2002, <http://www.nps.edu/programs/ccs/Docs/LeaderProfiles/Gul%20Agha%20Sherzai%20Profile.pdf>

15 Mangal Bagh Afridi, is the head of Lashkar i Islam, an armed group that, until 2011, was a dominant force in his native area of Bara in the Khyber Agency.

16 BBC, "Afghan attacks target Indian Mission," 3 August 2013. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-23558930>

17 The full title of this group is the Mahaz Fedayi Tehrik-e-Islami. It has claimed responsibility for the killing of the Governor of Logar, Arsala Jamal, in October 2013. Sina, "Rift in Afghan Taliban outfit surfaces: Afghan paper," 19 October 2013. <http://english.sina.com/world/2013/1019/638403.html>

in the district of Khogiani. There were claims that the different AGEs, largely comprised of local fighters, had different systems for generating revenue—a point emphasised in the tax data collected from respondents—and that they tended to operate independently of each other. In one instance, a group even attempted to trade ANSF captives that they had caught and that another group wished to use for leverage. As with forces aligned with the government, there was little sense of coherence among AGEs; alliances were temporary, local and a function of personalities and expedience rather than ideology.

In 2013, in the southern districts of Nangarhar, the population were confronted with a complex and messy political situation in which the state appeared to be withdrawing along with US military forces, relinquishing control to the rural population and a largely deconcentrated and localised insurgency. And while there was growing disdain among the population for those in government, and confidence that the state's coercive power would continue to diminish over time, many in the rural population continued to extract what benefits they could from state services or from employment in government jobs.

To fully comprehend the dramatic increases in opium poppy cultivation in the southern districts of Nangarhar, it is necessary to chart the political trajectories of the different districts covered by this research; to examine why a state that projected the appearance of political power so effectively in some of the most remote parts of Nangarhar between 2008 and 2010, subsequently found its authority progressively challenged; and to consider what shape and form resistance to the state now takes in these areas in the run-up to transition in 2014.

This is not the image of the insurgency that is often found in the policy narratives of the media and institutions like UNODC: of an exogenous military movement that emerged from across the border or of a monolithic insurgency intimately tied to revenue streams appropriated from illicit drug production. Rather, it is a more complex and deconcentrated political terrain, where local elites and the rural population have sensed the growing frailty within the Afghan state and sought to best position themselves by extending their links to the many armed actors that are emerging in the increasingly contested environment.

3.2 Increasing political complexity

Achin: The growing coalescence of state, anti-state and non-state actors

In early 2010, Achin was seen as a success in term of both counterinsurgency and counternarcotics. The Shinwari Pact—an agreement signed by tribal elders in late January 2010—was seen by some as an example of how tribes could align with the Afghan Government in the effort to rid the borders of such anti-state activities as encroachment by Taliban fighters or widespread opium poppy cultivation. Achin was presented (although never explicitly by the US military) as an Afghan example of the “sons of Iraq,”¹⁸ a counterinsurgency initiative launched in Iraq in 2008 and, as of 2010, still widely viewed as a successful venture.¹⁹

However, the Shinwari Pact unravelled almost immediately after it had been signed. By mid-February 2010, a land dispute had broken out between two of the Shinwari tribes, the Sepai and the Alisherkhel, both signatories to the Pact. Locally this dispute is often blamed on the patronage and favour that was gained by two *maliks*, village representatives who were key protagonists in the Sepai tribe: Malik Niaz and Malik Usman. These two men were also seen as the architects of the original Shinwari Pact.²⁰ For the Alisherkhel, the arming of Malik Niaz and the creation of a tribal militia or *arbaki* under his leadership following a violent conflict with a group of Afridi Taliban in October 2009, prompted a growing arrogance among the Sepai leadership that ultimately distorted the delicate tribal balance in the area.

The dispute between the Sepai and Alisherkhel was ostensibly over a patch of desert land to the south of Ghani Khel and north of Kahi. Initially it involved the Alisherkhel of Pekhar Khwar and the Sepai of the Mahmand valley, after the Sepai occupied land that the Alisherkhel claimed belonged

18 Dexter Filkins, “Afghan Tribe vowing to fight Taliban to get US aid in return,” *New York Times*, 27 January 2010.

19 Farook Ahmed, “Sons of Iraq and Awakening Forces,” *Institute for the Study of War*, February 2008.

20 Filkins, 2010.

to their tribe. Over the course of two years the dispute led to the involvement of a number of members of Parliament, a range of Nangarhari tribes and the direct involvement by the Governor and the President's adviser, Asadullah Wafa. It also led to two violent confrontations, the last of which culminated in a helicopter attack by NATO forces and the death of up to 18 Sepai tribesmen.²¹

In April 2013, the land dispute continued to divide Achin and the upper parts of Shinwar. In Kahi, the district centre of Achin, where members of both the Alisherkhel and Sepai tribes are found, the majority of shops remained closed as most traders remained fearful of being caught up in what had become a series of reciprocal attacks and "arrests." The conflict had also led to the division of the high school in Kahi into two separate schools in 2010, with the Sepai attending the original school building in Kahi and the Alisherkhel students relocating to a school in Pakhel in lower Achin. This division continued into 2013.

GIRoA efforts to resolve the dispute persisted in 2013 but achieved little. In March 2013, Asadullah Wafa, a man who had been involved intermittently in mediating the conflict since 2010, made a further pronouncement in an attempt to resolve the conflict, giving two-thirds of the disputed desert land between Ghani Khel and Kahi to the Sepai tribe and one-third to the Alisherkhel. Wafa's decision divided the land into three separate parts, each adjacent to the main road. The Sepai were allocated one tranche of land of 20,000 *jeribs* (about one-fifth of a hectare); the Alisherkhel two tranches of 5,000 *jeribs* to the north and south of the Sepai land. Ultimately this decision did little to build confidence in the government. The Alisherkhel rejected the decision as it gave land to the Sepai adjacent to the road and the existing Alisherkhel settlement east of the road, which they believed left them vulnerable to attack. The Sepai rejected the decision, in part because it was once again rejected by the Alisherkhel but also because they believed that the provincial authorities had done nothing to enforce this or previous decisions.

The failure to resolve this dispute had far-reaching consequences, not just with regard to the continuing divisions within the Shinwari tribe, which ultimately provided entry points for AGE, but also because of the way the dispute was handled by the central government and the provincial authorities. The Sepai felt that both the central government and the Governor failed in their function as mediator and executive to the conflict.²² The Sepai held the Alisherkhel directly responsible for "the death of up to 100 tribesmen,"²³ including those killed by the Alisherkhel during the initial fight in March 2010, as well as those by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in October 2011. Sepai respondents talked of revenge and saw the loss of life as a matter that could not be mediated by the state. The Alisherkhel were unhappy with the decisions that the state's representatives made in the dispute but seemed content with a process that did not attempt to enforce an ultimatum.

Among the Sepai, the land dispute was instrumental in fracturing the relationship between the population and the both the rural elite and the government. In Achin, the Governor Gul Aga Sherzai, was considered a spent force. Gone were the accolades and compliments regarding his contribution to development and his epithet, "the bulldozer." In their place were a list of insults and questions over the nature of his character.²⁴ As the President's appointment, the Governor reflected poorly on GIRoA, as did the pronouncements of Asadullah Wafa.

The reputations of the rural elite were also irrevocably damaged by their involvement in the affair and their role in the opium poppy ban. Malik Usman and Malik Niaz found themselves increasingly marginalised in 2013. Malik Niaz was said to travel within the area but only with armed men at his side. Reflecting his diminishing status within the community following the land dispute, some

21 A further 12 Sepai tribesmen are alleged to have been killed in the initial outbreak of violence between the Alisherkhel and the Sepai in March 2010.

22 "Why did Karzai appoint Sherzai to Jalalabad? He is a very bad and corrupt person. He is the cause of the dispute between the Sepai and the Alisherkhel," lower Achin #11.

23 This is the figure that the Sepai refer to, even though figures suggest that the number of dead may be closer to 30.

24 "We don't have anything to do with the Governor. We don't like Noorzai, we don't like Barakzai. We don't like Popalzai," lower Achin #8. "Don't talk about the Governor; he is Bachabas, he is Kuni," lower Achin #7. "The Governor is a very bad person. He is a slave of the American forces," lower Achin #10. "[Gul Aga Shirzai] is a very bad person. He is badmaash (a goon). Allah will kill him to free the whole area from the Governor," lower Achin # 6. "The Governor is a very bad person and corrupt person. He is involved in the dispute between the Alisherkhel and the Sepai," lower Achin #11. "We are most angry with the Governor. We pray to Allah that the Governor should be a darbadar [a beggar who goes door-to-door]," upper Achin # 10.

respondents referred to him as *chaprasi*, the equivalent of an attendant or janitor at a school. One farmer (upper Achin #7) commented, “If our village has work with the government [Malik Niaz] should go and do the work.” Often referred to as self-serving and corrupt by local farmers, the *maliks* were no longer required to act as brokers with a state that was seen as increasingly powerless within upper Achin. It was said that AGEs, being drawn primarily from the local population, engaged directly with the rural communities themselves, rendering the *maliks* almost superfluous.

Such was the penetration of AGEs into the district that by April 2013 Achin appeared to be divided by a demarcation line drawn to the south of the district centre. Kahi was dominated by the government and ANSF, but from the desert to the south of Kahi, it was AGEs that prevailed, symbolised by the white flag of the Taliban flying in Shadal bazaar and checkpoints manned by what were referred to as “Taliban soldiers” to the north and south of the village. It was claimed that the Taliban groups operating in Shadal were applying their own form of public order, for example allowing opium poppy to be traded openly in the bazaar while banning the sale of hashish: a policy that had been applied during the Taliban’s rule in the 1990s.

However, beyond these administrative centres—which, on the surface, appeared to represent two opposing forces in a conflict over territorial control—was a far more complex political terrain. Respondents did not report a cohesive regime in the upper parts of Achin but talked of myriad political groups, loosely referred to as Taliban, coalescing and seeking an accommodation both with each other and with the rural population. The rural population appeared to be free to draw government salaries and use government services. For example, despite significant AGE presence during the day and night, there remained significant numbers of households in Achin with family members in the ANSF who appeared to be under little duress to leave.²⁵ Schools also remained open, and most of those interviewed indicated that their children attended; several even had teachers within the family. Government health clinics were also operating in AGE areas, and those who were sick and did not have sufficient cash to visit a private doctor attended public clinics, as described in Section 3.3.

The coalescence of state services and AGEs was not seen as contradictory within the context of anti-government groups that emanated from the area and were subject to local rules and reciprocity. In fact, while they were often referred to generically as Taliban, it was far from clear whether AGEs were part of a coherent organisational structure. For example, there were reports of communities making quite different payments to AGEs within their specific areas. Some villages paid cash to AGEs via the local mosque, the amount determined by what people could afford (*qud ay was*) at the end of each growing season. Only a short distance away in another village, AGEs requested a fixed amount of opium from each farmer, determined by the amount of land cultivated, with most paying around one *paw* (430 grams) of opium. Here, as in many localities, those farmers who had direct relationships or mitigating circumstances could negotiate their payments, with some paying as little as one or two *qatoos* (the equivalent of 25-50 grams).²⁶ In other villages, respondents referred to paying *ushr*, often used as a generic term for tax, to both “the poor” and “the Taliban,” and it was far from clear how this payment was divided between the two.^{27, 28}

Respondents did distinguish one group from other local AGEs in the case of the Pakistani militant Mangal Bagh, in the Mahmand valley. It was claimed that Mangal Bagh had moved to Mahmand

25 “The attitude of the Taliban to the local people is very good. They say they don’t have any problem with those who work for the government or ANA [Afghan National Army] or ANP [Afghan National Police], but we will cut the head off those who are spies for the Americans. They have said to the mullah not to give prayer for those who are killed fighting for the ANA or ANP,” upper Achin #3.

26 One seer (1.2kg) contains 48 qatoos.

27 While payments are often assumed that payments to be at a rate of ten percent of the agricultural yield, detailed fieldwork in other parts of Afghanistan has shown that payments rarely exceed three percent of the final yield of the crops grown. See David Mansfield, Briefing Paper7: “Taxation in Southern Afghanistan.” (Unpublished Paper for FCO, March 2013).

28 Follow-up fieldwork in December 2013 also revealed reports of mosques in a number of different locations, in both Achin and Shinwar, contributing to AGE by providing the hides of the livestock killed during Eid Ul Adha. This is a practice that dates back to the early part of the Taliban movement in 1994. See Aishar Seemi Ahmad, “Between the mosque and the market: An economic explanation of state failure and state formation in the modern Muslim world,” (Montreal, McGill University dissertation, July 2012).

from his previous base on the Pakistan border in the district of Nazian, where he had been located since 2011. His attempts to relocate to the neighbouring Pekhar valley in Achin had allegedly been thwarted by rival AGEs that had drawn on the unity of the Alisherkhel to prevent him from gaining a foothold in the area. However, in the Mahmand valley, sharp divisions between the rural elite—in particular the ongoing animosity between Malik Niaz and Malik Shah Mahmood—as well as the conflict between the rural elite and the local population had allowed Mangal Bagh to secure a base in the upper part of the valley.

Mangal Bagh's presence in the area was not seen as an occupying force,²⁹ but he was considered a new source of patronage and power. There were numerous claims that he received support from the National Directorate of Security, the Government of India and the US Government for his cross-border incursions into Pakistan. In Achin there were claims that helicopters could be seen flying to Mangal Bagh's base in upper Mahmand and that this was how he was supplied with weapons by his supporters in the region. While ostensibly viewed as antagonistic towards Pakistan, Mangal Bagh was also seen as having political ambitions within Nangarhar. His move from Nazian to Achin was considered indicative of his desire to gain further territorial control as well as to evade the Pakistani authorities. It was also alleged that Mangal Bagh's political activities were not limited to the mountainous areas neighbouring Pakistan; there were claims that until recently he had maintained a liaison office in Markoh in the District of Shinwar.³⁰

Although he was not a dominant military force in the Mahmand valley, Mangal Bagh's presence did lead to a recalibration of allegiances, loyalties and networks. Rivals within the rural elite were alleged to be courting him and the international and regional patronage that was rumoured to support him. Long-term rivals Malik Niaz (Rahimdakhel) and Malik Shah Mahmood³¹ (Babarkhel) were thought to be particularly active in their efforts to gain favour with Mangal Bagh, recognising his influence in the area and how it might assist them to regain the social standing they had lost.

In lower Achin, AGE presence was largely contained in the Sepai areas of Maidanak, Marouf China and into Syachob in upper Shinwar, but even in these areas their presence was restricted to the hours of darkness. Marouf China and Syachob were seen to be particularly prone to incursions by AGEs due to their proximity to Bati Kot. In the Alisherkhel areas of Pekhar Khwar, in the *manteqas* (village clusters) of Koga Khel and Pakhel, there was little enthusiasm for the Taliban, but at the same time only a few respondents showed much support for the Governor. Across both valleys there was an increasing sense among the rural population that the state and its security infrastructure had retreated along with US military forces and that the government did not have the coercive power by which to enforce its will, and, in particular, to eradicate the opium crop (see Section 3.3).

Box 2: Intimidation

(From upper Shinwar #4)

This week the Taliban came to me. "Please remove your sons from the army." I said, "This is fine, but who will give me income? Who will buy my family food? If you give me money I will remove my sons from the army but if you can't do this it is my obligation to keep them there." We had strong words but they left. Each day I go for ablutions. Two days ago I learned that the Taliban had hid in the wheat field nearby with the plan to kill me. I had returned early and they approached one of my villagers. They stopped him; one [Talib] asked, "Who are you?" and the other [Talib] said, "That is not him." I learned about this and went to the *madrasah* [religious school] in the village where the Taliban are from. I told them, "If you kill me my sons will return and kill you and your family." I am afraid that the Taliban may kill me because my sons are in the army but we need the income.

Even in upper Shinwar there were concerns as to whether the state would prevail, given the presence of AGEs, an increasing number of attacks on the ANSF and the growing number of robberies, kidnappings and murders in the area. In fact, reports of robbery were widespread and there many

²⁹ It was claimed that a number of Afridi fighters accompanied Mangal Bagh, as well as some fighters from Kunar.

³⁰ This had been run by Amin Shah Shinwari from the Sunkhel tribe who was claimed to have mediated contacts between Mangal Bagh and GIROA until his death in January 2013, allegedly at the hands of a Pakistani-supported Taliban group.

³¹ Shah Mahmood is alleged to have been behind the attack on Malik Niaz's nephew by Afridi Taliban located in the area.

in Shinwar claimed that they avoided going out after dark for fear of kidnapping and theft.³² It was suggested that those travelling on the main road between Markoh and Ghani Khel were particularly vulnerable, and that even the shops in Markoh bazaar, located in lower Shinwar on the main Jalalabad-to-Torkham highway, closed at around 5 p.m. to allow traders to return to their houses without fear of robbery or kidnap. In Markoh there were also reports of thieves presenting themselves as Taliban, demanding payments from shopkeepers and those with family members working with non-governmental organisations (NGOS). In contrast to Achin, there were many reports of intimidation for those in Shinwar with family members in the ANSF. The growing unease among respondents in Shinwar was palpable, heavily influenced by events in Bati Kot and the increases in armed attacks on the main highway near Markoh.

Khogiani: An uneasy accommodation

The same patterns of government retreat and AGE penetration could be seen in the district of Khogiani, with armed fighters far more established in the upper parts of the district than in the lower areas. The security situation in Khogiani has always been problematic, even in the early days of the Karzai administration. Tribal and personal animosities within the rural elite have divided the community and offered entry points for different insurgent groups. These include Anwar Al Haq Mujahid, leader of the Tora Bora Military Front and son of the former *mujeddin* leader Younis Khales, and supporters of Hezbi Islami (Hekmatyar), who is from Khogiani. In the 2010-11 growing season, the security situation in Khogiani deteriorated significantly in response to the provincial authorities' botched eradication campaign in the neighbouring district of Sherzad in April 2010, as well as to growing opposition to civilian casualties. During 2011 and early 2012, the Taliban made significant inroads into the upper valleys of Zawah and Pirakhel, establishing a permanent presence in the area and helping to create an environment far more conducive to extensive opium poppy cultivation.

In the latter part of 2012 and during the first quarter of 2013, the government sought to reclaim some of the territory it had lost by mounting a number of counterinsurgency operations conducted by the ANSF and brokered with the local population. The main focus of the counterinsurgency effort was in the village of Kajir in Pirakhel where the Taliban had established a strong foothold in 2012 under the leadership of Hazratullah Khanjal and Abdullah Khan Mirzakhel.³³ The counterinsurgency succeeded in pushing the insurgents back into the remote mountain area of Jakai where they were alleged to have a permanent base, it also reduced the number of attacks on ANSF military bases, such as the one near Khelago.

Local explanations for the success of the counterinsurgency initiative centred on the cooperation between the commander from the Afghan National Army (ANA) who was in charge of the operation,³⁴ the local population and, to some extent, the AGEs residing in the area. Key respondents and respondents talked of two counterinsurgency operations during the winter that had been hard fought by the Taliban and resulted in a number of deaths among the ANA and Afghan National Police (ANP). However, during the third operation, four to six weeks prior to the fieldwork for this study, the ANSF had not faced resistance and had not been fired on from villages in the upper valleys. It was reported that AGEs had been requested to leave the area, or at least to not carry their guns openly and to refrain from firing on the ANSF. Locally, this kind of accommodation was considered possible because the majority of AGEs were from Khogiani itself and were keen to maintain the favour of the rural population, and because the "foreign" (meaning Pakistani) Taliban, often regarded as more radical and uncompromising, tended to remain out of sight in the remote mountainous parts of the district.

Aware of the local elders' efforts to convince AGEs to refrain from fighting and grateful for the rural population's support, the ANA commander was alleged to have announced that "poppy is free this year," a refrain that was repeated by a number of respondents during the course of the fieldwork (see Section 3.2). One respondent recounted the ANA commander's speech to the elders in which he stated that, when he was initially posted to the eastern region and told p that

32 During the course of the fieldwork in Shinwar, respondents described a number of such incidents, including a failed attempt to kidnap the doctor at Ghani Khel Hospital. It was reported that following the incident, the doctor and his wife, who was also a doctor, had returned to live in Jalalabad.

33 Allegedly a former ANA soldier who had turned to the Taliban after his father had been killed by US forces in 2012.

34 People described the ANA commander as being from Khost; some referred to him as a general in the ANA.

he would be conducting an operation in Khogiani, people would tell him that the population of Khogiani were bad and Khogiani itself was like hell (*Jahannam*). But he told the elders that when he arrived in Khogiani and began to speak with the local population he realised that this was not the case: that the people of Khogiani were good but very poor people. He said that the people of Khogiani were fighting the government because they were so poor and that if they had food they would not fight. This was a speech that appeared to have considerable resonance with the population, particularly the commander's announcement that the population's poppy crop would not be destroyed in 2013.³⁵

While respondents alleged that this settlement between the ANSF and the local community had led to a fewer outbreaks of armed violence during the preceding six to eight weeks, at the time of fieldwork the security situation was becoming increasingly tense. The primary reason for this was ongoing negotiations with the provincial and district authorities over eradication, as described in Section 3.2. There was particular resentment of the agreement that many believed the ANA commander had made with the Khogiani elders. The main target of the population's ire was not the ANA commander but Governor Gul Aga Sherzai, who was seen to be the main protagonist in undermining the original agreement.³⁶ In lower Khogiani, where the population were most fearful of eradication, it was the *maliks* who were accused of corruption and of using the eradication campaign to their own political and financial advantage.³⁷

Despite growing evidence that the authorities recognised they did not have the coercive force to pursue a robust eradication campaign in Khogiani and rumours that major concessions were being offered, there was little sense that the population would accept any crop destruction, even in the lower areas bordering Surkhrud.³⁸ While few believed that the government would mount an aggressive eradication campaign, many of those interviewed indicated that a campaign of coerced crop destruction would inevitably lead to violence. Many threatened to take up arms against the government, including those respondents with family members in the ANSF.³⁹

A further reason for growing disaffection among the local population in upper Khogiani was the behaviour of the Afghan Local Police (ALP) established a few months earlier. Once the ANA had reclaimed territorial ground in Wazir, a unit of the ALP was established with the hope of holding the area. The man appointed to be head of this force was Jan Mohammed, son of Malik Nazir, nephew of Haji Zaman Ghamsharik and cousin of Jawed Zaman,⁴⁰ the head of the provincial council. However, there were repeated complaints that Jan Mohammed resided in Kargah and was

35 "If the government provided jobs for our people we would not cultivate [poppy] but they just try and destroy our crops and do nothing else," upper Khogiani #4.

36 "Gul Aga Shirzai is a very lazy person. He doesn't do anything for the people. This is why we grow poppy. Previously he was very popular. He paid 300,000 PR to build the local mosque. When he first arrived there were a lot of projects on the main road to Wazir. Now there is nothing," upper Khogiani #4. "The Wali is dum, murdagow and corrupt. He is a dancer and dances with sinners when he has parties at his house," lower Khogiani #4. "I f*** Gul Aga Sherzai. Gul Aga is a dowus (someone who allows the women of his household to behave without honour or shame a murdagow, (a man who sells women for sex) he is a thief. He is not correct. He is also an agent of Pakistan," lower Khogiani #6.

37 "The malik will say the government wants to destroy ten jeribs when the government wants only five because the malik wants to threaten the people and take their money. The maliks are the dog of the waliswal," lower Khogiani #9. "If we don't do anything against the government they don't come to the village and threaten the people. It is always the malik that threatens the people. Now he threatens the people to destroy the crop. Five years ago the malik did the same business and collected one paw from each farmer to give to the farmer who lost their crop but [the malik] gave only half a paw to the farmer and kept the other half," lower Khogiani #10. "This year the maliks cultivate opium poppy. My malik has grown 20 jeribs and I have cultivated only 1.5 jeribs. Now the malik has collected 1000 PR from each household for the eradication campaign to give as rishwat to the police. This is not right. The malik cultivates 20 jeribs and gives only 1000 PR. It should be that those who cultivate more, give more money and those that cultivate less give less money," lower Khogiani #6.

38 "The waliswal requested to the maliks, 'Please point to some land where we can eradicate the crop and take a picture. The person whose land it is can be given opium by others. We do not accept this [eradication]. In less than three weeks we start the harvest. It is better they kill our people than destroy our crop. This year is a very good crop. So even if they destroy a poor crop we will lose a lot of yield," lower Khogiani #9.

39 "If the government wants to use its force [to destroy our poppy], we will also use our force against them," lower Khogiani #7.

40 It is alleged that there is a longstanding dispute between the families of Haji Nazir and Haji Zaman Ghamsharik. Although Haji Zaman was Haji Nazir's half-brother, he is blamed for the death of Haji Nazir in Kohat in Pakistan. Such is the animosity that a key respondent reported that some of Jan Mohammed's men and those of Jawed Zaman got into a firefight in the Khelago area of lower Khogiani on 21 June 2013.

not from Wazir; nor were the solders under his command. Respondents complained that members of the ALP were not “good people” and accused them of theft, drug use and uninterested in establishing order in the area. There were numerous allegations by those interviewed in the area that the ALP indulged in public humiliations, beatings and coercion of the local population.⁴¹ Others questioned why an ALP was necessary, given the prevalence of ANSF in the area, their competence and the respect that the population had for these forces.⁴² The failure to maintain security was seen as primarily the fault of government; some respondents challenged the very purpose of a government that could not maintain order itself and delegated this task to others, be they local militias or foreign forces.⁴³

AGE in Khogiani were seen as more dominant than in Achin, and the rural population appeared to be concerned about the consequences of not complying with AGE demands, despite the argument that there was local support for the Taliban and that many of the fighters were from the area. There was also greater uniformity in the contributions respondents made to AGEs, which could suggest a more coherent organisational structure in upper Khogiani. Across villages in Pirakhel and Wazir, respondents reported making payments to AGEs, known as *chandar*, via the local mosque. These payments were collected in the spring at the end of the winter growing season, and in the fall, once the summer crop was harvested. Payments were based on what households could afford but rarely exceeded 3,000 Pakistani rupees (PR) in the spring and 2,000 PR in the fall.

But even in upper Khogiani, the rural population found ways to take advantage of government services and employment despite AGE presence. As in Achin, a number of respondents benefited from the salary of a family member in the ANSF while at the same time paying contributions to the Taliban at the local mosque each season. The opium crop of these people remained unscathed, and schools and health clinics in these areas remained open.

In lower Khogiani, AGE presence was less apparent. Respondents claimed that they had not been approached to make the kind of contributions to AGEs that were apparent in the upper areas, although they sometimes encountered requests for “charity” or “assistance” at the local mosque.⁴⁴ There were also reports in Khelago that villagers had approached AGEs and asked them to resist firing on the military base near Karga, concerned that if these attacks continued the population would get caught in the crossfire. It was claimed that the Taliban had agreed to this request and desisted from direct attacks on the ANSF military base. Nevertheless, at the time of the fieldwork there was growing agitation among the rural population in the area and increasing expression of support for AGEs in Khelago, Kuz Bihar and Bar Bihar, due to the rumour of an upcoming government-mounted eradication campaign.

41 “We don’t like the Arbaki, all of them are thieves. We worry about the future and what will happen,” upper Khogiani #5. “Good people don’t join the arbaki, only the worst people,” lower Khogiani #4.

42 “If there is a government, why do they send an arbaki to the area. [The government] has an army, they have police. They just send the arbaki to threaten the people. Near to this area is the base of the [Afghan] Border Police; why not support them? People respect them, they respect their uniform, but no one likes the arbaki, no one respects them. We do not like them; they are not good people,” upper Khogiani #6.

43 “If they are a government, why can’t they improve this situation? If they are a government, why do the Americans do this in our village?” upper Khogiani #9.

44 Payments to the mullah in these areas were separate from any requests for assistance by AGE. In lower Khogiani, the mullah typically receives a salary from the villagers. Depending on the agreement reached between the villagers and the mullah, this will typically consist of a payment for his services either in cash or in “grain.” Payments in cash are made monthly and often consist of only 200-350 PR per household. Payments in kind will be made at the end of the winter and summer growing seasons. They consist of a measurement of “grain”—wheat and maize—often no more than five seer of each crop per household. Some households choose to offer more or to make supplementary payments that they refer to as charity (*khairat*). In addition to his salary, the mullah also receives food each day. If the mullah is from another village and does not reside with his family, the households take turns preparing two meals a day which the mullah either eats with them or in the house where he is living. Where the mullah is from the village and resides with his family, unprepared food is collected from each household and taken to the mullah’s house where his family prepares it. A mullah in lower Khogiani reported that he had reached an agreement with his village of 40 households that he would receive five seer of wheat per household for the winter season and three seer of maize for the summer, the equivalent of 1,400 kilogrammes of wheat and 840 kilogrammes of maize for the whole year. This was insufficient to meet the demands of his ten family members who on average consumed ten kilogrammes of wheat each day. This mullah also cultivated six jeribs of land in the village, five of which he owned; all six were cultivating opium poppy in the 2012-13 growing season.

In conclusion, by April 2013 there was growing evidence in the southern districts of Khogiani and Achin that the Afghan state had retreated along with US forces, replaced by new systems of political order that were based on complex and dynamic local configurations of power. In this environment, the various forms of AGEs, the entities working under the banner of the Afghan Government and the ANSF all had the leverage to influence the balance of coercive power temporarily. But none appeared to be able to gain a more permanent and dominant control over the southern districts.

Each of these entities has attempted to better position themselves with the rural population through a combination of negotiation, populist positions and selective violence. For instance, AGEs have typically not closed down government services even in the more remote areas of Nangarhar. On occasion they have retreated to avoid alienating the local population, and AGE presence in an area has constrained the state's capacity to destroy the opium poppy crop—a popular move with rural communities in the southern districts where viable alternatives have been hard to find. At the same time, state institutions such as the ANSF, district administrators and local security commanders from the ANP have sought accommodations over opium poppy cultivation and eradication to gain concessions from the population during counterinsurgency operations and to minimise the threat of violent unrest. The ANSF has also approached representatives of the rural elite to request mediation with AGEs, in order to reduce resistance to operations and lower the risk of casualties on all sides.

The rural population is far from passive in this kind of terrain; they are political actors who take advantage of an environment where no single group has concentrated the means of violence, adopting a pragmatic and instrumentalist approach to power. Where they can, they maintain relations with all the armed groups that operate in their area, even offering a family member to fight for each. In the short run, this strategy allows rural households to extract whatever advantages that can be derived from this hybrid political order; they draw on government services in education and health and employment in the ANSF, as well as on the benefits that this kind of security regime offers with regard to the cultivation of opium poppy and marijuana. In the longer term, this strategy ensures that the rural population has a foothold in each armed group, should one of them gain ascendancy.

3.3 The resurgence of opium poppy cultivation in 2012-13

Dramatic rises in cultivation

Within the increasingly complex and uncertain political terrain in the southern districts of Nangarhar, opium poppy increased dramatically, rising from an estimated 3,151 hectares in 2012 to 15,719 hectares in 2013. Among the districts covered by this study, opium poppy could be found in Achin, Khogiani and Shinwar; key respondents also reported that it was growing in Kot and Chapahar. Along with these districts, UNODC reported cultivation in Goshta, Lalpur, Pachir Wa Agam and Sherzad.⁴⁵ Furthermore, in contrast to the previous growing season, opium production was not found only in the upper areas of Pekhar and Mahmand in upper Achin and in Pirakhel, Zawah and Wazir in upper Khogiani; the level of opium poppy cultivation also increased in the lower parts of Achin in areas such as Maidanak, Marouf China, and parts of Koga Khel; around the district centre of Kahi; and in Khelago and Bihar in lower Khogiani. Opium poppy was also found in Shinwar, although contained in the increasingly contested area of Syachob in the upper part of the district.

The extent of opium poppy cultivation differed depending on the area's proximity to the state and its security infrastructure. In the upper areas of Achin and Khogiani, where the state had rescinded what little control it had to the local population and AGEs, opium poppy occupied much of the agricultural land. In fact, in many areas of upper Achin and Khogiani it was difficult to identify fields that were *not* opium poppy, and only a few fields of clover and wheat could be seen (see Figure 3). In the Pekhar and Mahmand valleys of upper Achin as much as 90 percent of the land was estimated to be grown with opium poppy. Similar levels of cultivation could be seen in the valleys of Zawah, Pirakhel and Wazir in upper Khogiani (see Figure 4).

⁴⁵ UNODC did not report any opium poppy in the district of Shinwar, reporting that 40 hectares were eradicated and the district was poppy-free (UNODC/MCN 2013: page 101, 105).

Figure 3: Widespread opium poppy cultivation in the Mahmand valley, Achin, April 2013



Figure 4: Widespread opium poppy cultivation in the Pirakhel valley, Khogiani, April 2013



While the security situation made it impossible to conduct fieldwork in the Mahmand valley itself, it was possible to work beyond Shadal bazaar in Asadkhel, Batan, Ghundai and Trelay. All those interviewed in upper Achin (n12) had cultivated opium poppy in 2013. This was despite the fact that many (n7) had lost some or part of their crop to the eradication campaign in 2012.⁴⁶ Eradication in 2012 had simply prompted them to cultivate opium in the 2012-13 growing season, confident that the presence of armed men opposed to the government would keep the government from destroying their crop in the spring. Because land holdings in this area are relatively small, ranging from one to five *jeribs*, none of those interviewed in upper Achin had allocated less than 40 percent of their land to opium poppy during the 2012-13 growing season; most produced opium on at least two-thirds of their land. Marijuana was also widely grown in this area during the summer of 2012 (n7).

In the lower parts of Achin, opium poppy cultivation was not as prolific but still increased dramatically in 2012-13 compared to the previous year. Cultivation was more prevalent in the Sepai areas in lower Achin than in areas such as Koga Khel and Pakhel in Pekhar Khwar. In Maidanak, it was estimated that 30 percent of the area was opium poppy: twice as much as in the previous year. Cultivation had also increased significantly in Marouf China, occupying around 30-40 percent, compared to negligible amounts in the 2011-12 growing season.

Among respondents in lower Achin (n14), half (n6) reported that they cultivated opium in 2012-13 where they had not grown it in 2011-12. Four other respondents, two in Maidanak and two in Marouf China, had cultivated opium poppy the previous year and increased the amount of land they allocated to the crop in 2012-2013. Farmers in lower Achin—particularly in the Pekhar Khar valley⁴⁷—were not confident that their crop would remain unscathed during the eradication campaign in 2013, which was beginning as fieldwork started in the area.

None of the respondents who cultivated opium poppy in lower Achin in the 2012-13 season had allocated more than 40 percent of their land to opium poppy, with some cultivating less than one *jerib*. In Koga Khel and Pakhel there was some reluctance to returning to opium poppy in 2012-13, and there were farmers (n4) who refrained from cultivation altogether despite the fact that many of their fellow villagers were cultivating small amounts of opium poppy once again. One respondent in Koga Khel actually refrained from cultivation due to his experience with eradication the previous year.⁴⁸

In comparison to Achin, opium poppy cultivation was even more prolific in both the upper and lower areas of Khogiani in the 2012-13 growing season. In the Wazir and Pirakhel valleys almost all of the land was devoted to opium poppy. Interviews with individual farmers in Hakimabad, Ahmadkhel, Mullah Noor Kalay, and Mizakhel confirmed both the findings of aerial photography and visual estimates. For example, all of those interviewed in the upper areas of Khogiani (n12) reported that they cultivated opium poppy, the vast majority (n10) of whom monocropped it: grew it year after year on the same land. Those farmers who did not monocrop cultivated only a small part of their overall land with clover: in one case only one-half a *jerib* of clover and seven-and-a-half *jeribs* of opium poppy, in another one *jerib* of clover and nine *jeribs* of opium poppy.

Opium poppy had also increased in the lower part of the district of Khogiani, despite its proximity to Jalalabad. It was estimated that opium poppy occupied up to 90 percent of the land in Kuz Bihar, an area advantaged by its distance from the main road. In Bar Bihar, located near the highway to Chapahar and the ANSF/US military base on the outskirts of Karga, opium poppy

46 Three respondents also claimed that they had lost their crop during the 2011 eradication campaign.

47 The crop was in flower in Maidanak during the fieldwork and the harvest had already begun in parts of Chapahar, Lalpura and Khogiani.

48 This farmer planted two *jeribs* of opium poppy and one *jerib* of wheat in 2011-12 but claimed to have lost all his crop. "When the eradication campaign destroyed the field my children and wife were unhappy. For five days I did not go to my field as I was so unhappy about it. They destroyed my crop at harvest time and at that time nothing can be grown in the land. The government are enemies of the people and all the maliks are shaitan (devils)," Lower Achin #3. During the 2012-13 growing season, this farmer cultivated three *jeribs* of wheat which, given a yield of 70 seer per *jerib* (a total of 1470 kilogrammes from three *jeribs*) and a consumption rate of 4.5 kilogrammes per day (a total of 1,642 kilogrammes per year), would not have produced enough wheat to feed his family of nine. He had already mortgaged one *jerib* of his land for 60,000 PR and taken a further loan of 70,000 PR for household expenses and agricultural inputs.

occupied around 40 percent of agricultural land in the 2012-13 growing season. This was a lower level of cultivation than in Kuz Bihar but still represented a steep increase from the previous year. All those interviewed in lower Khogiani (n12) cultivated opium poppy in the 2012-13 growing season, whereas only four had produced opium the previous year. All allocated more than one-third of their land to opium poppy; the majority more than half.

The only other instance of opium poppy cultivation in the areas where research was conducted in April 2013 was Syachob in upper Shinwar. All those interviewed in the area (n3) were cultivating opium poppy but on only a small fraction of their total land.

Efforts to curb planting

For many of those interviewed, the eradication effort in the upper areas of Nangarhar during both the 2011-12 and the 2012-13 growing seasons reflected the weakening of state institutions in these areas, in particular the limits to the ANSF's coercive capacity. In the 2011-12 growing season, the opium crop remained largely untouched in the upper parts of the southern districts bordering Pakistan where the crop was most concentrated. Instead, the eradication campaign in the spring of 2012 focused on the main Kabul river valley, as well as the lower parts of the districts of Khogiani and Achin. The eradication typically did not stray far into the upper reaches of Achin and Khogiani or the more insecure districts of Pachir wa Agam, Sherzad and Hisarak where the bulk of the 2012 crop could be found.

Despite this more concentrated effort in the lower areas, where the Afghan state had greater presence and territorial control, 48 people were killed during the 2011-12 eradication campaign in Nangarhar, and an estimated 784 hectares of opium poppy were destroyed (see Figure 5).

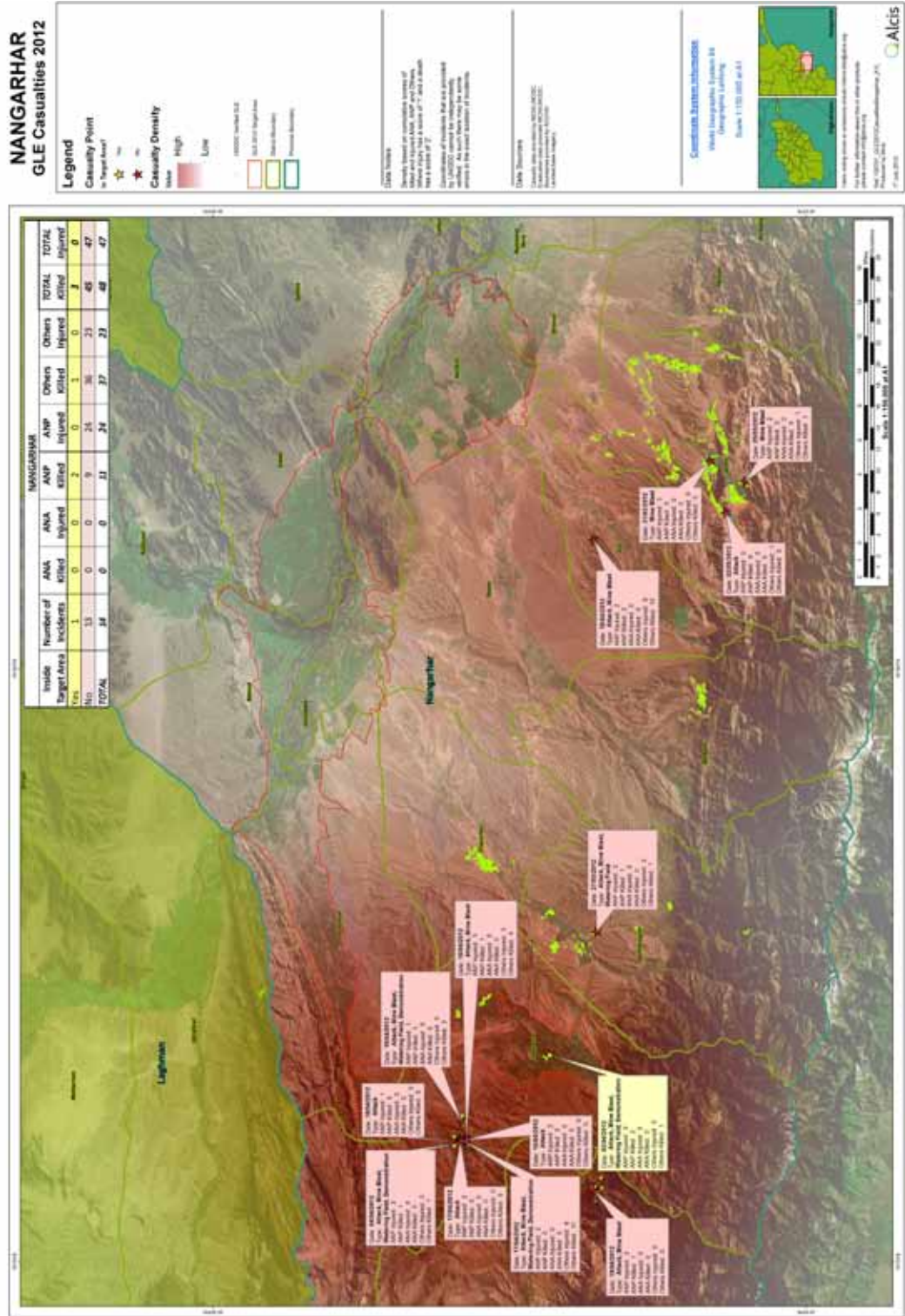
GIRoA's statements threatening crop destruction for those who persisted with poppy cultivation in the 2012-13 growing season were viewed within the context of the previous year's eradication campaign, along with farmers' perceptions of the state's current capacity to enter an area and destroy the crop. The limited nature of 2011-12 crop destruction in the upper and lower parts of Achin and Khogiani, and in particular the degree of resistance in lower Khogiani in the spring of 2012, reassured many farmers in these areas that they would not face crop losses in 2013 and gave them confidence to plant. For instance, of those

interviewed who cultivated opium poppy in the 2011-12 growing season in upper Achin (n11),⁴⁹ and lower Achin (n5), ten had experienced eradication but only one respondent in Koga Khel, lower Achin, had abandoned opium production in 2013. The other respondents who had experienced eradication in 2012 had either allocated the same amount of land to opium poppy in 2013 as they had the previous year (n3), or increased the amount (n7). An additional eight respondents who had not cultivated opium poppy the previous year took up opium poppy cultivation in the 2012-13 growing season. This further highlighted the fact that the eradication campaign in 2012 had done little to raise the perception of risk among farmers in Achin, even in the lower areas.⁵⁰ In Khogiani, none of those interviewed who had cultivated opium poppy in the 2011-12 growing season (n12) had experienced eradication in the spring of 2012.

49 Only one respondent in upper Achin did not cultivate opium poppy in the 2011-12 growing season. This individual (upper Achin #2) lived in Pakistan in 2012, returning to Batan in Upper Achin for the beginning of the summer growing season. He was cultivating opium poppy in the 2012-13 growing season.

50 "I am opposite with the government as they destroyed my crop and now I am poor. This year the government can't come to the area and destroy the crop," upper Achin #4.

Figure 5: Government-led Eradication in Nangarhar, 2012



Furthermore, many farmers in upper and lower Achin reported that much of the crop destroyed in the spring of 2012 was that closest to the road and that fields located farther away had been spared. With more significant AGE presence⁵¹ in both upper and lower Achin in 2013 and a growing sense of a government that could no longer draw on the coercive power of the US military, most respondents in these areas were confident that their opium crop would remain unscathed. For those interviewed in Achin, the eradication campaign in 2012 was simply a further example of the disconnection between the government and the people. It had served to further alienate the local population⁵² in the context of the land dispute, the ongoing opium ban and increasingly vociferous complaints about corruption.

Aside from an ineffective eradication campaign in the spring of 2012 and the dwindling power of the state, it was also clear that the rural elite, who had previously acted as intermediaries between the state and the local population, had been largely silent on the issue of opium poppy cultivation during the 2012-13 planting season. In fact, there was no evidence that the rural elite in Achin had been supportive of a ban. They did not appear to have performed the same functions that they had in previous years, when prominent *maliks* such as Niaz and Usman had actively campaigned to dissuade farmers from planting opium by several means: refraining from cultivating themselves, telling villagers that they would not get them released from prison if they were arrested, allegedly informing the authorities which farmers had grown the crop, and facilitating access of the eradication team to poppy-growing sites.

Instead, respondents reported that even where *maliks* had informed the *waliswal* (district governor) during meetings at the district centre that they would disseminate the government's counternarcotics messages, once they were in the village their message was very different and villagers were told to cultivate opium poppy. Many of those interviewed in both upper and lower Achin claimed that the *maliks* had grown opium poppy themselves or told the villagers that, while there was eradication last year, there would be none this year (upper Achin #9). Others reflected on how little influence the *maliks* had on this issue.⁵³ Moreover, the role the *maliks* had played in imposing the ban in the past had not been forgotten. Along with complaints about the appropriation of aid and the role that the *maliks* had played in the land dispute, it was another reason for the growing disaffection with both the authorities and the rural elite.⁵⁴

These same claims and complaints were heard across Khogiani, in both upper and lower parts of the district, where efforts to dissuade planting had little credibility, particularly in the context of the government's counterinsurgency effort described above. It was suggested that Jawed Zaman, then head of the provincial council, and son of Haji Zaman Ghamsharik (both from Zawah), had come to the district centre before the opium-planting season in the fall of 2012 to persuade elders that they should inform the rural population not to grow opium poppy and that they threatened any poppy growers with arrest. Respondents said that the elders informed Jawed Zaman that the government would have to arrest the "whole of Khogiani," as opium poppy would be grown across the area. At the time of fieldwork there seemed to be little fear of a robust eradication campaign, even in lower Khogiani.

51 "The Taliban have blocked the way so the government can't come and destroy [the crop] this year," upper Achin #3.

52 "The government made me poor. The government is cruel. It fills its pockets but my children are hungry. This eradication does not affect my decision. I have grown more poppy this year," upper Achin #2. "By eradication the government gets a lot of money from foreigners and they put it in their pocket. They just destroy the crop of the poor people. The children of the government people are happy while ours go hungry," Upper Achin #3. "Life is not good due to the loss of my opium crop. But I have no power. If I had power I would kill the government employees for destroying my crop," upper Achin # 10.

53 "It is not the malik's decision to ban poppy," upper Achin #7.

54 "All maliks are shaitan. The provincial government puts some money in their pocket and they do shaitani for the government," upper Achin #3.

Negotiating eradication in the spring of 2013

The 2012-13 eradication campaign took place in the southern districts against this backdrop of dramatic increases in opium poppy cultivation, dwindling support for the government and the growing presence of AGEs. The number of casualties incurred in Khogiani during the 2012 eradication campaign was also a reminder of the degree of hostility the authorities might face were they to mount a robust effort to destroy the opium crop in the spring of 2013. This was not an environment in which the local and provincial authorities could easily coerce the population to desist from cultivation or destroy the crop once it was grown as they had in previous years, and many of those interviewed in Achin and Khogiani seemed very aware of this, even in the lower parts of these districts.⁵⁵

The eradication campaign in 2013 proved to be limited but did not provoke the levels of violence that had been seen in the spring of 2012 (see Figure 6). By the end of the season UNODC reported that 157 hectares of opium had been destroyed in 48 villages in Nangarhar, primarily in Khogiani (53 hectares), Shinwar (40 hectares), Achin (32 hectares) and Chapahar (20 hectares).⁵⁶ However, reports of eradication in the districts covered by this research proved particularly hard to verify. For example, while in lower Achin there were reports of eradication conducted in Lokhay and Marouf China, a subsequent field visit to Marouf China suggested that the eradication campaign was cursory at best. Some farmers in Marouf China claimed that around eight *jeribs* of opium had been destroyed a few days earlier but even this was hard to verify (see Figure 7). Others said that the *waliswal* of Achin, a nephew of Fraidoon Mohmand, was a good man and “helped the people of Marouf China.” They suggested that he had simply walked through the fields but had not actually destroyed anything.⁵⁷ One respondent whose crop had been destroyed in the spring of 2012 had already lanced the crop three times when the eradication team came to the area. His crop remained intact, as did the crops of two other respondents in Marouf China.

55 “I think the government is weak and won’t be able to destroy my field,” Lower Achin #10.

56 UNODC also reported crop destruction in Pachir wa Agam (6 hectares), Deh Bala (5 hectares), Kot (1 hectare) and Nazian (1 hectare) (UNODC/MCN 2013: 105).

57 There were suggestions in both lower and upper Achin that the *waliswal*’s public request to the Governor for greater assistance with eradication had served to deflect the blame for such low levels of crop destruction to the provincial authorities. It was even argued that an effective eradication campaign would have done little for the *waliswal*’s popularity and aided Gul Aga Shirzai—not something that the *waliswal* was willing to do, given his uncle’s involvement in the campaign to depose the Governor.

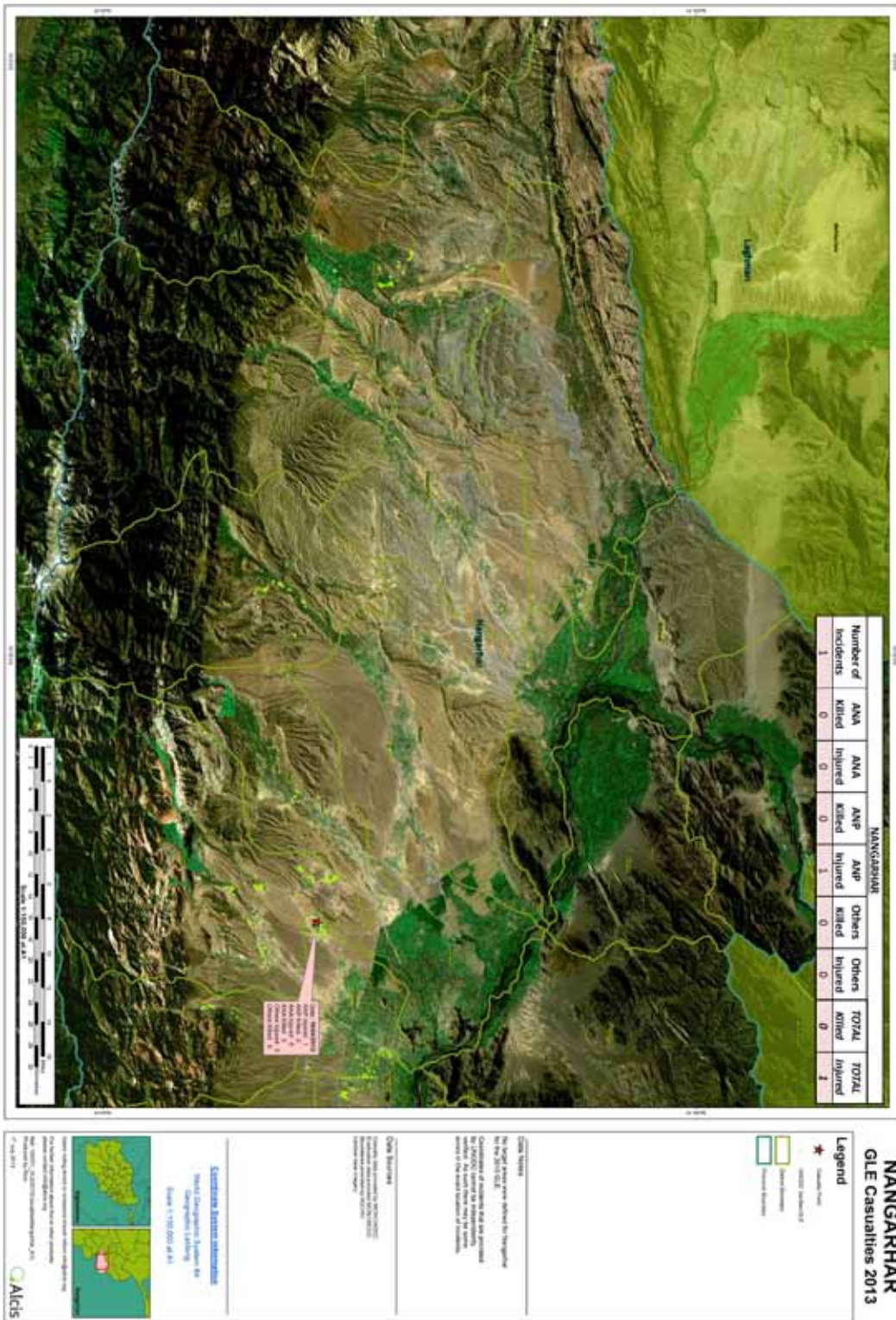


Figure 6: Casualties from Governor-led Eradication, 2013.

Eradication in Syachob in upper Shinwar appeared a little more robust than in lower Achin. Here the *waliswal* of Shinwar District, located in nearby Ghani Khel, was said to have reacted badly to the communities' attempts to thwart the initial eradication team's efforts a few days earlier. Locally it was said that "our younger generation fired on [the eradication team]," an attack that the authorities had attributed to the Taliban. Following this episode, the *waliswal* was said to have accompanied the eradication team during its subsequent visit where about half the standing crop was destroyed, amounting to perhaps 20-30 *jeribs* at most (see Figure 8).⁵⁸

This kind of coerced effort was the exception rather than the rule in Nangarhar, and it was limited to the lower areas where the government had greater control. Elsewhere the eradication campaign consisted of the district authorities requesting communities to allow small amounts of the opium crop to be destroyed so that this could be presented as evidence that an effective eradication campaign had taken place. For example, in the Pekhar valley in upper Achin there were claims that the *waliswal* had informed the elders that the district authorities would not come to the area to destroy the crop but had requested "small plots to be destroyed and pictures taken." In neighbouring Kot, the security commander was alleged to have agreed to a campaign where only small amounts of the crop were destroyed and to have told the elders, "I am skilled in destroying a little and making it look like a lot."⁵⁹

Figure 7: Eradication in Marouf China, Lower Achin, April 2013



58 There were no other reports of eradication in the district of Shinwar during the course of fieldwork other than in Wiala 29. No other opium poppy was seen in upper and lower Shinwar during the field visits, despite media reports that the authorities were eradicating the crop in the area.

59 The security commander in Kot is alleged to have told elders, "A good man cares about the people." There were further claims that, in gratitude, opium was collected from some of the communities who did not lose their crop and the authorities received 42 seer of opium. One respondent said that this amount "was only 100 grams each. It was very easy for people but it is very difficult to lose all our crop," Achin #1, 2014.

Figure 8: Eradication in Syachob, Upper Shinwar, April 2013



In Khogiani, the eradication campaign was all the more weakened by the rural population's disaffection with the government; the ANSF's efforts to gain the support of the population for the counterinsurgency campaign conducted during the winter of 2012-13; and the provincial authorities' dwindling coercive power in the absence of US forces. As already discussed, the ANA commander responsible for the counterinsurgency campaign was grateful for local support in the final push against AGEs and is alleged to have offered farmers an amnesty on their crop during the 2012-13 growing season. It was claimed that the ANA commander offered this concession during a meeting with Khogiani elders, a meeting at which the Governor's representative was present.

However, on learning of the agreement reached at this meeting, Governor Gul Aga Sherzai is said to have disagreed with the ANA commander, arguing that "the army has its job but the matter of opium poppy is the responsibility of others" and that "the provincial administration [was] under a lot of pressure to do something about poppy by the international community." It is claimed that the Governor wrote to the *waliswal* to this effect, requesting that he conduct an eradication campaign in the district. The *waliswal* was reported to have subsequently approached the elders with this request, asking that each *manteqa* in Khogiani destroy 100 *jeribs* of opium poppy.⁶⁰

At the time of fieldwork, this request had been declined by the Khogiani elders and there were reports that the population would resist any effort to destroy the crop, with violence if necessary. The *waliswal* and the provincial authorities were largely seen as weak and unable to impose crop destruction on the rural population, even in the lower parts of Khogiani.

The perception that the Governor and the local authorities were rescinding on the agreement between the elders and the ANA commander⁶¹ responsible for the counterinsurgency operation further angered the population. Many blamed the Governor for what they saw as a shift in the government's position. In lower Khogiani, considerable opprobrium was also targeted at the *maliks* who, at the time of fieldwork, were negotiating with the local authorities, even pressing the population to provide financial contributions to bribe the eradication team. Others also blamed western nations, arguing that it was the drug policy of some of the government's supporters that

60 In Khelago one respondent caricatured the discussions between the *waliswal* and the elders as one in which the *waliswal* had requested, "Please eradicate 50 *jeribs* in Khelago and take a photo to show the foreigners," lower Khogiani #9.

61 "The commander said that the government wouldn't destroy the crop," upper Khogiani #4. "It is the help of the central government that they saw our crop but they don't destroy it," upper Khogiani #8.

compelled the authorities to ban opium and destroy the crop⁶²—an argument that has often been used by the Governor and the local authorities when pursuing reductions in opium poppy in the past.

Although respondents in Khogiani were somewhat reticent about the eradication campaign at the time of fieldwork, most believed that the government would not elect to destroy the crop without reaching some kind of accommodation with the local population. They believed that the authorities were aware that failure to broker a deal would provoke a violent response and fuel support for AGEs in the area. Many in lower Khogiani, as in Achin were of the view that the government would be wise to abandon its eradication efforts.⁶³ Some even suggested that their support for the government was contingent on its not pursuing eradication.⁶⁴ The prospect of a more vigorous eradication effort in Achin and Khogiani in the 2013-14 growing season was seen as even less likely, given the government's diminishing coercive capacity and the potential for further encroachment by AGEs in the future.⁶⁵

A boon to the local economy

In upper Khogiani and Achin, there were already signs of a growing buoyancy in the economy, a welcome change after the contraction experienced during the years of the opium ban. The success of the opium poppy harvest the previous year, with yields of fresh opium of between seven and 11 *seers* (the equivalent of 48-66 kilogrammes per hectare)⁶⁶ and farmgate prices (the price for the sale of produce directly from the farmer) of around 23,000 PR per *seer* (the equivalent of US\$193 per kilogramme) meant that farmers once again had disposable income.

In fact, many in upper Khogiani and, to a lesser extent, in Achin already reported an improvement in the quality and quantity of food they consumed, eating more meat and fruit than they had during the years that they had not cultivated opium poppy.⁶⁷ Most of those interviewed indicated that with the return of opium poppy to the area they now ate meat every seven to ten days. Some households—typically those with a member of the family in the ANSF or with another form of non-farm income—referred to eating meat up to three times a week and every day of the week during the opium harvest. Two respondents had purchased a dairy cow with their income from opium poppy the previous year, thereby further improving the families' nutritional intake (Lower Khogiani #4; Upper Achin #1).

In contrast, those in lower Khogiani who had not cultivated opium poppy in 2012 and those in upper and lower Achin who had lost their crop to eradication talked of eating meat at best once a month. In these areas, the situation was most acute for those who accessed land in a sharecropping arrangement and had no access to non-farm income due to the lack of working-age males in their household.⁶⁸ Only those with substantial non-farm income, typically from having a family member in the ANSF, claimed to eat meat and fruit as regularly as those who had a successful opium crop in the 2011-12 growing season.⁶⁹

62 “If the government allowed people to grow poppy, the security would be good. If people find food they will not fight and they will not receive the gun and join the Taliban. If the government bans poppy, the people will be poor and will fight the government and each other. It is the right of the people to grow poppy. Why do the foreign people constrain the people and not let them grow poppy?” lower Khogiani #4.

63 “If the government does not interfere with our people and destroy the crop we will not interfere with them,” upper Khogiani#1). “If the government is quiet [and doesn't eradicate our crop], we will be quiet,” upper Achin #3.

64 “My brother is in the army. I accept this government, I support this government but we have expectations that the government will help the people. If the government or Governor destroys our crop we will be opposite to him and if they don't destroy our crop we will like him,” lower Khogiani #7.

65 “The government will not be able to eradicate next year as it gets weaker year by year,” lower Achin #8. “Next year we will have the same crop; the government is not able to do an eradication campaign,” lower Achin #12.

66 Key respondents in Achin and Khogiani reported that fresh opium loses around 20-25 percent of its weight before drying and being sold as dry opium.

67 “My life is better as I have more income than last year. Before I had the bread of jawzai (maize) and vegetables of clover. This year I can afford wheat flour and I have bought meat,” lower Achin #11. “My food is good this year as we have income. Once or twice a week we have meat from the bazaar. When we didn't have cash money it was difficult for my family to get meat once a month,” upper Achin #3.

68 “I can't buy meat, my food is vegetables of the land, I have no money,” lower Khogiani #6.

69 “My life is better than the life of other people and farmers as I have a good job [in the ANA] and salary,” lower Achin #1.

Aside from improvements in food consumption, farmers who had obtained an opium crop in the spring of 2012 also argued that they could now afford to visit a private doctor, rather than using the government health clinic or simply “buying tablets from the local store,” as they did when they had less cash income during the period of the poppy ban. One respondent who had cultivated opium poppy in the 2012-13 growing season had obtained an advance on his future opium crop in order to pay for his son’s medical treatment in Pakistan. His son, who had broken his back while fighting for the ANA in Ghazni, had received treatment in Kabul but his father believed he would get better care in Pakistan.⁷⁰ Another respondent in lower Khogiani was repaying a debt of 500,000 PR that he had incurred in 2010 to pay for the treatment of his wife in Pakistan, dedicating half of his land to opium poppy in 2012 and all of it in 2013.⁷¹

Further evidence of renewed confidence in the local economy was the growing availability of credit, both cash and in-kind, in Achin and Khogiani. There was evidence in both districts that the system of advance payments on the future opium crop—known locally as *salaam* or *pishaki* had reappeared for the first time since 2007, the year before Gul Aga Shirzai banned opium. A number of households in Khogiani and Achin had already taken payments of between 12,000 and 15,000 PR during the spring for their future opium crop.⁷² Others had taken cash loans, ranging from 10,000 PR to 50,000 PR to purchase fertiliser and pay for the weeding of their opium poppy crop, as well as to meet household expenditures during the winter. One respondent in lower Khogiani (#11), confident of the return of opium poppy to the area, had taken a loan of 150,000 PR to sink a tubewell: a deep well in which a long pipe is bored into an underground aquifer. Others had paid for family weddings.⁷³ As one respondent (upper Khogiani (#7) put it, “Poppy is from God; it has lots of benefits. When we go to Jalalabad, shopkeepers now show respect, they offer loans and they help load our cars.”

The multiplier effect of the resurgence of opium poppy was also beginning to become apparent in the service sector both locally and for the economy in the Kabul river valley, including Jalalabad. Locally benefits were accrued by a range of services. For example, a barber in lower Khogiani reported a substantial rise in the amount of money he earned from village weddings now that opium was being grown again: “I am very happy that opium poppy is cultivated. My economic situation is much better. Every wedding I get 10,000 PR to 20,000 PR. If people grow poppy they marry more sons. When poppy was stopped they only gave me 4,000 PR to 5,000 PR” (lower Khogiani #2).

Income derived from opium production was also being invested in education (n6),⁷⁴ livestock (n4), transport (n2) and consumer items such as solar panels (n2). A number of households reported that they were now sending their sons to private educational facilities. These ranged from courses in the English language in Wazir bazaar at a cost of 500 PR per month to fees for private schools in Jalalabad (600 PR per month), to vocational courses such as nursing, to fees for a private university in the provincial centre, with prices ranging from 3,000 PR per month to 5,000 PR per month. The only respondent in these districts who had invested in further education or vocational

70 This respondent’s son had been injured in January 2013. The father had taken an advance on four seers of opium for 48,000 PR to help meet the 60,000 PR fee for his son’s medical treatment in Pakistan. The father was now the only other person earning an income in this household of 11 people. They had only two jeribs of agricultural land in lower Achin. Aside from the 22,000 PR his son had earned each month for the last eight months, this household had earned 90,000 PR from one jerib of onion and sold two goats for 10,000 PR each. They had not obtained sufficient wheat to feed their family from the one jerib they had cultivated in 2011-12 and had purchased fifty seer of wheat for 9000 PR. The land was dry during the summer, producing a maize crop that was only suitable for fodder for livestock. In 2012-13, he cultivated one-and-a-half jeribs of wheat and half a jerib of opium poppy. lower Achin #10.

71 This individual had six jeribs of land; five jeribs were his own and one jerib he obtained as a sharecropper. He commented, “My life gets better year by year now that I have grown opium poppy this year and last,” lower Khogiani #4.

72 *Salaam* is typically paid at a rate of fifty percent of the prevailing price of opium on the day that the advance is taken.

73 “Because of a good yield I had a wedding for my son,” upper Khogiani #12.

74 A respondent with ten jeribs of land and 12 family members had cultivated four jeribs of opium poppy in 2012, but it had been eradicated. He sold 5 seer of the opium that he had stored from the last time he had cultivated opium poppy in the 2006-07 growing season and received 125,000 PR. He used this money to pay for his two sons to attend the agricultural facility at Jalalabad University at a cost of 2,500 PR per month each. In 2013 he cultivated half of his land with opium poppy. As of 23 April 2013 he had harvested his crop three times and his crop remained unscathed despite the government’s rather limited eradication effort in the village ten days earlier.

courses but who had not grown opium poppy in the 2011-12 growing season had three household members earning non-farm income: one as a teacher, one in the ANSF and another who owned a drug store. This individual had two sons in a private university in Jalalabad (lower Achin #5).⁷⁵

At the time of fieldwork there were also signs of more immediate economic benefits accruing to respondents from the opium crop in the form of daily wage labour. The labour-intensive nature of the crop had already established another source of off-farm income for households prior to fieldwork: for the weeding of the crop, which paid as much as 500 PR per day during the late winter⁷⁶ and early spring. However, the opium harvest had just started at the time of fieldwork, paying as much as 800 PR per day to daily wage labourers as well as providing three meals per day (a value of 250 PR), with the anticipation that rates would rise further as the harvest in other districts began.⁷⁷

Many positioned their return to opium poppy cultivation as a necessity, blaming the absence of viable alternatives and the lack of government investment in the southern districts.⁷⁸ There were repeated references to the demise of development aid⁷⁹ in both Achin and Khogiani and accusations that the rural elite had accrued the bulk of the assistance that had been made available over the previous year.⁸⁰ The vast majority (n46) argued that there had been little to no development assistance over the last one to two years.⁸¹ These comments were part of a broader narrative about the failure of GIRoA to maintain security and promote economic development, and of a rural population that had to manage its own livelihood, unfettered by the government's position on opium poppy cultivation. For many, government seemed largely irrelevant despite the fact that a large number of respondents in these two districts (n27) had family members who worked in the public sector, in either education or the ANSF.

A small minority of respondents were more sanguine about the reasons why they had once again begun to cultivate opium poppy. One respondent referred to the different income streams that he could now draw upon and how opium poppy cultivation was less an issue of necessity and more a matter of habit. Another respondent reflected on the changes that he had seen in his life over the last ten years and the different opportunities that were now available to his family: "Ten years ago we only cultivated poppy and we sat in our houses. Now we have jobs, we have a store in Ghani Khel hospital, a son who is a teacher and another in the army. I am happy with our life. In the past all the people had enemies; now they have a job. In the past they stayed in Achin for

75 The teacher earned 8,800 Afs a month, the soldier in the ANA 13,500 Afs/month and the son who owned the drugs store 20,000 PR per month. This individual had taken up opium poppy during the 2012/13 growing season commenting, "If my poppy is not destroyed my life will be better, as this is another source of income," lower Achin #5.

76 The weeding season for opium poppy in Nangarhar begins in the last week of January.

77 This includes breakfast of milky tea and bread, a break at around 9:30-10:00 a.m. for dried fruit and tea, followed by lunch and dinner. Both these latter meals would include a meat dish.

78 "If the government provided jobs for our people we would not cultivate [opium poppy] but [the government] just tries to destroy our crop," upper Khogiani #4. "If the government allowed people to grow poppy the security would be good. If people find food they will not fight and will not receive the gun and join the Taliban. If the government bans poppy the people will be poor and will fight the government and each other. This is the right of the people to grow poppy. Why do the foreign people constrain the people and not let them grow poppy?" lower Khogiani #4.

79 "The previous year he was very popular; Gul Aga Shirzai paid 300,000 PR for building a mosque. When he first arrived here there were a lot of projects on the main road to Wazir but now there is nothing," upper Khogiani #5. "No one comes here. Just look at the road—it is too bad but no one comes to fix it." (upper Khogiani #10). "I am unhappy with the government. I am not sure about security in the future, the government can't improve security, it can't provide jobs or work," upper Khogiani #11.

80 "Gul Aga Shirzai only supports the malik, not the people. He collects the cruel maliks in one place and all the assistance that comes to the village is sold in the bazaar," lower Khogiani #2.

81 Development assistance is often perceived as new and tangible inputs or projects in an area. Services such as education and health would typically not be seen as development assistance. In upper Achin, the lack of development assistance was typically attributed to the land dispute and the presence of the Taliban in the area. In lower Achin, some blamed the land dispute while others reported that development assistance had been given to communities in the last year but the maliks had not distributed it. In upper Khogiani there was little explanation for the fact that no one claimed to have received development assistance, although some (n3) did argue that assistance had been given by the government but that the maliks had received it and had not distributed it. This was also a relatively common refrain in lower Khogiani, although one respondent also reported that his brother had worked for 2.5 months on a National Solidarity Programme (NSP)-funded project where he was paid 180 Afs (the equivalent of 330 PR) per day (lower Khogiani #2). Another (lower Khogiani #7) referred to the work NSP was doing in his village on the canal intake. Two other respondents reported that they had received cotton seed and fertiliser from an NGO (lower Khogiani #9 and #10).

opium; now that poppy is banned they go out from Achin, they have money and find a new way of life.’ (Lower Achin#5)

A review of household income data for Achin and Khogiani highlights just how challenging the environment is in these districts for those households that do not have access to either high-value agricultural crops or non-farm income. These are, after all, areas with many more household members than the national average of 7.4;⁸² 68 percent of those interviewed lived in households with more than ten members, as opposed to a national average of only 22 percent. They are also households with significantly less than the national average of six *jeribs* of irrigated land.⁸³ For example, none of those interviewed in upper Achin had access to more than five *jeribs* of land during the winter months, and the average was only 3.2 *jeribs*. Household sizes varied from six members to 16, with an average of 10.2. Despite the large number of household members, only 2.25 were considered to be working full time, and 49 percent were under the age of 15. With wheat yields of between 80 to 110 *seers* per *jerib*, these households could barely attain self-sufficiency if they allocated all their land to wheat, with little surplus to sell so that they could purchase other essential commodities.⁸⁴

Table 1 shows patterns of crop production that have been found in the upper areas of districts like Achin and Khogiani over the last few years. The table covers the cropping patterns across several time periods: the banning of both opium poppy and marijuana in 2008-09 (Cropping Pattern 1), the return of marijuana production in the summer of 2010 (Cropping Pattern 2), the subsequent return of opium poppy cultivation in 2011 and 2012, with a summer crop of marijuana⁸⁵ (Cropping Pattern 3) and extensive opium poppy cultivation in 2013, both with and without marijuana (Cropping Patterns 4 and 5). When these patterns of crop production are imposed on the average size of landholdings and numbers of household members for upper Achin, one can see the disparity in gross income derived from a cropping system based on a winter crop of wheat and a summer crop of maize (Cropping Pattern 1), compared to a system where even a small amount of marijuana is grown (Cropping Pattern 2) and where marijuana and opium poppy are introduced (Cropping Pattern 3). The last segment of this table documents a range of non-farm income that some households have drawn on as part of their livelihood.

As Table 1 demonstrates, the cultivation of wheat and maize offers a gross income of only 25.5 PR per person per day, and even with one family member earning a non-farm income, gross income per capita in these districts would still be well below US\$1.00 per day, unless that family member were in the ANA. The introduction of marijuana during the summer season offers some respite, adding on average an extra US\$0.40 gross income per person per day, but it still leaves a household’s gross income per person per day below US\$1.00. Only with the monocropping of opium poppy (Cropping Pattern 4) and some marijuana cultivation in the summer can this average household in upper Achin earn a gross income of more than US\$2.00 per person per day through agricultural production alone.

82 Central Statistics Office, National Risk Vulnerability Assessment 2011-12, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2014, 12.

83 Ibid. xvii.

84 With an assumed consumption rate of 0.5 kilogrammes of wheat per household member per day, an average household of 10.2 family members would require 1,861 kilogrammes of wheat to be self-sufficient. With an average yield of 90 seer of wheat per *jerib* (the equivalent of 630 kilogrammes), 3.2 *jeribs* of land would produce 2016 kilogrammes of wheat, not accounting for post-harvest wastage or seed (estimated at around ten percent).

85 None of those cultivating marijuana in upper Achin in 2012 and 2013 cultivated more than one *jerib*. Many could not cultivate all of their land during the summer months due to water shortages. All cultivated some maize, largely to feed their livestock

Table 1: Gross economic returns on different cropping patterns and non farm income in upper Achin, Nangarhar

Cropping Pattern 1										Cropping Pattern 2									
	Wheat	Maize	Wheat	Maize	Wheat	Maize	Wheat	Maize	Hashish	Wheat	Maize	Wheat	Maize	Hashish	Wheat	Maize	Wheat	Maize	Hashish
Jeribs	3.2	3.2								3.2	2.2								
Yield/jerib	90	65								90	65				4				3
Price (PR)	200	180								200	180				22000				7000
Sub total (PR)	57,600	37,440								57,600	25,740				88,000				21,000
Gross income	95,040									252,340									
Gross income/day (PR)	260.38									691.34									
Gross income/capita/day (PR)	25.53									67.78									
Cropping Pattern 3										Cropping Pattern 4									
	Poppy	Wheat	Maize	Hashish	Poppy	Wheat	Maize	Hashish	Wheat	Maize	Wheat	Maize	Hashish	Poppy	Wheat	Maize	Wheat	Maize	Hashish
Jeribs	2.2	1	2.2	1	3.2	0	2.2	1	3.2	0	0	2.2	1	3.2	0	2.2	0	2.2	1
Yield/jerib	8	90	65	4	8	90	65	4	8	90	90	65	4	8	90	65	90	65	6
Price (PR)	23,000	200	180	22,000	23,000	200	180	22,000	23,000	200	200	180	22,000	588,800	200	180	200	22,000	10,000
Sub total (PR)	404,800	18,000	25,740	88,000	588,800	0	25,740	88,000	588,800	0	0	25,740	88,000	588,800	0	25,740	0	88,000	60,000
Gross income (PR)	617,540				783,540				783,540					783,540					
Gross income/day (PR)	1,691.89				2,146.69				2,146.69					2,146.69					
Gross income/capita/day (PR)	165.87				210.44				210.44					210.44					

Cropping Pattern 5					Non-farm Income							
	Poppy	Wheat	Maize		ANA	Teacher	Driver (own car)	ANP (local)	Driver (others)	Labour (Jalalabad 4 months)	Shop	
Jerbs	3.2	0	3.2		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Yield/ Jerib	8	90	65		23,733.94	10,954.13	600	14,605.5	400	500	15,000	
Price (PR)	23,000	200	180		12	12	365	12	365	121.67	12	
Sub Total (PR)	588,800	0	37,440		284,807.3	131,449.5	219,000	175,266.1	146,000	60,833.33	180,000	
Gross Income (PR)	626,240				284,807.3	131,449.5	219,000	175,266.1	14,6000	60,833.33	180,000	
Gross income/day (PR)	1,715.73				780.29	360.14	600	480.18	400	166.67	493.15	
Gross income/ capita/day (PR)	168.21				76.50	35.31	58.82	47.08	39.22	16.34	48.35	

To earn an equivalent income in the winter without monocropping poppy, households would still need to cultivate opium poppy and/or marijuana and have a family member earning a non-farm income, or have three family members in the ANA. One respondent (lower Achin #3) explained that, while his household only had one *jerib* of land, the three sons earned 35,000 Afghani (Afs) per month—equal to about US\$642—serving in the ANSF. This brought the total

household income to 420,000 Afs (about US\$7,706) per year to pay for the upkeep of eight family members—about US\$2.63 per day per person. The family had not always been in this position; an earlier dispute over the suicide of the respondent's eldest son's wife had led to his son's imprisonment for seven years, requiring the respondent to sell one *jerib* of land and give 350,000 PR to his father-in-law to resolve the conflict. The respondent said, "I am happy with my life. When the Karzai regime came, my life improved because my sons got a good job."

It is important to note that this analysis is based on agricultural prices received by farmers for the 2011-12 growing seasons. As such, gross incomes are relatively high, due to opium prices of 23,000 PR per *seer* and hashish prices of as much as 22,000 PR per kilogramme for Grade 1, 10,000 PR per kilogramme (kg) for Grade 2 and 7,000 PR per kg for Grade 3. In 2013 opium prices fell to between 12,000 to 15,000 PR per *seer* and hashish prices fell to between 13,000 and 17,000 PR per kilogramme for Grade 1, between 5,000 to 6,000 PR per kilogramme for Grade 2 and as low as 2,500 to 3,000 PR per kilogramme for Grade 3. If this reduction in opium and hashish prices is factored in, gross incomes fall to US\$0.49 per person per day for Cropping Pattern 2, US\$105.13 for Cropping Pattern 3 and US\$130.40 per person per day for Cropping Pattern 4 (a reduction of as much as US\$0.80 per person per day compared to 2012 prices) and US\$106.32 for Cropping Pattern 5. These reductions illustrate just how vulnerable household incomes in these areas are to variations in the price of drug crops.

In sum, it can be seen that there is a high dependency on drug crop production in the southern districts of Nangarhar. Small land holdings, the large number of household members and the limited number of working members within the household make opium poppy an integral element of rural livelihoods, particularly in the upper parts of districts like Achin and Khogiani. These are areas where there was little evidence of the uptake of high-value horticulture and the adoption of the complex cropping systems that can be seen in lower areas in the Kabul river basin during the years in which opium was effectively banned. While there has been some cultivation of tomatoes, groundnuts and onions in lower parts of the districts and around the district centres in Achin and Khogiani, these crops alone offer little compensation for the loss of opium poppy, or indeed marijuana, given such small units of land. Of course they offer even less income to those who obtain land on a sharecropping basis and only receive half of the final yield.

Non-farm income—in particular enlistment in the ANSF—has been one of the few strategies for meeting some of the significant shortfall in cash income that households have experienced in the absence of opium production in these areas. For larger households with a number of males of working age, the loss of income can be made up through a combination of enlistment in the ANSF and other non-farm income streams. However, this is the exception to the rule; most households are limited by the number of males that are available to join the ANSF because of household demographics and of culturally defined gender divisions of labour in the agricultural sector, as well as a preference for maintaining a sufficient adult male presence within the household, especially in insecure areas. There are also real concerns as to the hazards those enlisting in the ANA face when posted to the most insecure provinces.

At the moment, the widespread return of opium poppy is a supplement to those with family members in the ANSF, and vice versa. Neither the rural population nor AGEs see any inconsistency between working in a government post (being a teacher or having family members in the ANSF) and cultivating opium poppy.⁸⁶ It is unclear whether this position will continue and whether households may be pressured to leave the ANSF in due course. Were this to happen, the dependency on opium poppy and marijuana cultivation in these areas would become all the more extreme.

⁸⁶ A further example of the way that households do not appear to make any moral judgment with regard to income sources from drug is a respondent in lower Achin who had brother who worked in heroin factory in Keshem, in Badakhshan while at the same time a further household member was in the ANA (Lower Achin #4).

3.3 Conclusion: Nangarhar

The political situation in Nangarhar deteriorated significantly in 2013. While then Governor Gul Aga Shirzai and the former *jihadi* elite and their scions squabbled over political positions in Jalalabad, the insurgency made significant territorial gains, consolidating its position in the upper areas of the southern districts bordering Pakistan. Indeed, the insurgency's gain in territory brought it increasingly close to the outskirts of Jalalabad in the district of Chapahar—no longer limited to the area south of the Chapahar river near Kandy Bagh. And AGEs were regularly attacking the main Highway in Bati Kot, as well as stopping and searching passengers en route between Torkham and Jalalabad.

Criminality also became such a big problem in the Kabul river valley in 2013 that the once prosperous bazaar on the Jalalabad-to-Torkham road—Markoh in the district of Shinwar—closed before dusk as the shopkeepers feared kidnapping. Even in Jalalabad there was a marked increase in the number of people who could be seen travelling around the city with armed bodyguards; and it became increasingly essential for anyone of importance visiting the restaurants by the Behsud bridge to be accompanied by an armed entourage. This growing trend for armed protection appeared to be a function of both fear and status, and it offered further evidence that the gun will be playing an even more prominent role in Afghan politics and society.

How was the rural population to interpret these shifts in the political configurations in the province and the growing insecurity in the Kabul river valley? Primarily rural communities saw a political elite at war with itself over the distribution of rent, land and position. The fact that Haji Zahir—a standing member of Parliament (MP) and until recently the deputy speaker in the *wolesi jirga* (the lower house of Parliament)—played such a leading role in the blockade of Jalalabad in April 2013 in his attempt to depose the Governor, made it clear that little had changed amongst Nangarhar's politico-military elite despite Afghanistan's move to parliamentary democracy. Haji Zahir's inability to hire more than a few protestors to man the blockade and the speed with which the protests died out said much for his unpopularity in the city and the surrounding countryside. The fact that former supporters of the Governor and firm opponents of Haji Zahir—people like Malik Jehanzeb Khan of Kama—joined in the MPs' call for Gul Aga Shirzai's dismissal heightened the impression that the Governor was weak, that Nangarhar's body politic was brimming over with opportunists and rent seekers, and that the former *jihadi* elite will ultimately prevail.

More importantly, the failure by the central government to step in and resolve the ongoing dispute with Haji Zahir fed the view that then Governor Shirzai retained his position largely because the President did not want to see Gul Aga Shirzai back in Kandahar. It confirmed in the minds of many that politics and rent extraction in southern Afghanistan were of much higher priority to Kabul than the future stability and development of Nangarhar. Such is the rot in the body politic of the province that the population looked to how it could best manage uncertainty and the change in political order that transition had already unleashed.

Allegiances are now increasingly fluid. In the upper valleys it is not uncommon to find families with household members in the ANSF, whose near or distant relatives have joined the Taliban, and who themselves are making contributions to the insurgency at the local mosque in the form of cash payments. In the upper districts, health clinics, schools, jobs in the government and sending sons to private courses and colleges in Jalalabad all coalesce with the presence of and, in some cases membership in, armed opposition groups.

The situation is all the more complex in Mahmand valley in Achin due to the presence of Mangal Bagh, an Afridi "Talib" from across the border in Pakistan who locals believe is supported financially and militarily by the US Government and GIRoA in order to undermine the government of Pakistan. Here local Taliban groups cohabit with Mangal Bagh's Afridi militants while the local rural elite—Maliks Usman, Shah Mahmood and Niaz (two of whom are the founding fathers of the Shinwar Pact and the protagonists in the violent land dispute in Achin) privately court the political and military support of these armed groups, at the same time as they maintain their relationship with the government in Kabul and Jalalabad. These local leaders manage this complex and dynamic web of relationships in order to gain advantage over their rivals and ensure their continued role as brokers between the rural community and whichever group gains political ascendancy, in what will undoubtedly be a quite different political order after 2014.

It is in this increasingly uncertain and insecure terrain that opium poppy returned in abundance. None of the centres of political power—local, sub national, provincial or national groups—had an interest in acting against the crop even if they had the coercive power to do so. In the upper parts of districts like Achin and Khogiani, opium poppy occupied almost all the land under cultivation in the 2012-13 growing season; there were only a few fields of clover for animal feed and almost no wheat crop at all. Further down the valley near the district centres of Kahi and Kargha, cultivation fell away but opium poppy still occupied as much as half of the cultivable land in some areas. In the lower part of these districts the level of poppy cultivation fell again, this time to 20-30 percent of cultivable land. There were even signs of small amounts of poppy cultivation in Fatehabad, bordering Khogiani, and in the area running alongside the Tor Ghar mountain in Surkhrud, as well as in Syachob in Upper Shinwar.

There was also evidence that the crop is once again becoming more firmly established across these districts. Indeed, confidence that the crop was here to stay prompted the return of *salaam*, a system of advance payments on the future crop, for the first time since 2007. In Shadal, opium is once again being bought and sold openly in the bazaar, although it is interesting to note that, as in the 1990s, the Taliban appear to have adopted a more punitive position on cannabis and the trade in hashish is prohibited and has to be conducted by farmers “in secret” (although cultivation is plainly visible).

There were few signs of the government having the coercive power to eradicate the crop in the upper districts of Nangarhar. In fact, the farmers in areas in upper Achin—such as Batan, which saw extensive eradication in April 2012—significantly increased the amount of land they allocated to opium poppy in 2013 and showed few signs that they feared they might lose their crop to an eradication campaign. Even in the lower parts of Achin bordering the district of Shinwar, in places like Marouf China, there were few signs of eradication despite official reports of crop destruction.

While there were some reports of corruption, this was not a scenario of officials using the threat of eradication to leverage payments out of a passive rural population; it was more a situation where officials requested the assistance of rural communities so that the state’s inability to act was not exposed to the provincial, national and international actors who monitor levels of drug crop cultivation. The situation in Khogiani offered a good example of the multiple and competing objectives that the state tried to balance in the 2012-13 growing season. In Khogiani, the government was unwilling to incur or inflict the kind of casualties that it did during the eradication season in April 2012, where 45 were killed and 36 were injured. More importantly, the Afghan security forces were unwilling to lose the gains they made in three counterinsurgency operations undertaken over the last winter. In fact, many rural communities were under the impression that the ANA commander who led these operations—appreciative that the Taliban were asked by villagers to leave the area and grateful that farmers did not take up arms themselves—announced to the district’s elders that their opium crop would not be destroyed in the spring of 2013.

The Governor’s reaction to this announcement further signaled Gul Aga Shirzai’s impotency to the rural population. No longer able or willing to travel to the district centres to impose a ban as he had done in the 2007-08 and 2008-09 growing seasons, the Governor wrote to district officials requesting that they eradicate the crop. Aware of the limits of their territorial control and the late stage in the season, the district Governor of Khogiani looked to negotiate an agreed amount of eradication for each *manteqa*. But elders and communities were still unwilling to agree, and the harvesting started in the third week of April, 2013. Reports from the ground suggested that farmers were not even willing to sacrifice their weakest crops “just for photos for the foreigners,” even though it was proposed that they would be compensated by their neighbours. Many farmers believed that the provincial authorities had been allocated US\$300 million for crop destruction by the “foreigners” ‘but had “kept it for themselves.”

Efforts to destroy the opium crop in Nangarhar in 2013 were also hampered by the fact that it was an excellent crop, with capsule sizes that occur only a few times in a decade. Moreover, rural households in the Spinghar piedmont needed the economic stimulus that the crop would bring. With small landholdings, high population densities and not having had a crop in many of the

lower, drier areas since 2007, the high yield offered a welcome respite. Furthermore, the farmers had experienced a significant increase in the cost of food items and agricultural inputs over the last few years as well as reductions in the flow of aid, with even less assistance anticipated following the drawdown. Having seen the bubble finally burst in the urban economy in Jalalabad, farmers believed that this was the right crop at the right time and that it was worth fighting for. The government knew this and looked for the best way to be seen to be acting against the crop without provoking widespread dissent.

But what does all this mean for Nangarhar in 2014? And given the province's location as the main route for trade with Pakistan, what effect will it have on Kabul? How will the government's inability to act against the opium crop this year play out, particularly as the the withdrawal of US forces reaches its climax and Presidential elections take place?

As with most situations in Afghanistan, the prevailing levels of insecurity and the divisions within the political elite make it hard to offer firm predictions on the future of Nangarhar. One thing, however, does seem clear: unless the current crisis in the political leadership of the province is resolved, the level of opium poppy cultivation will continue to rise—up from almost 16,000 hectares in 2013 to figures that would be more reminiscent of 2004, when cultivation exceeded 20,000 hectares. In fact, if the political situation in the province were to continue on its downward trajectory, there is a strong possibility that the crop could return to the canal command area where the bulk of the province's agricultural land is located. If opium poppy were visible from the main highway once again, it would say much to the population about the writ of the Afghan state.

At the end of this study, it was clear that eradication in the 2013-14 growing season was even less feasible than it had been in 2012-13. The presidential election scheduled for April 2014 was likely to put a strain on security in the southern districts. Getting the rural population to vote in these areas would be hard enough; encouraging them to vote—even if candidates paid them to do so—while destroying their crop seemed particularly improbable. It also seemed highly likely that drug monies would become an increasing part of the electoral campaign. After all, a government and a democratic system that the rural population considers a failure and views as dominated by men of violence is going to have to solicit votes somehow.

Before the eradication season it was anticipated that if the provincial authorities actually tried to press into the Spinghar piedmont and enforce a ban in the 2013-14 growing season, the only likely winners would be those in opposition to the current government. In fact, since the poorly managed eradication campaign in the district of Sherzad in April 2010 that led to a number of ANP being killed, there had been a growing realisation among the rural population that the best way to protect the crop was to accept the Taliban into the area.

Looking further into the future, to the post-transition period, it was evident that fealty—as temporary as it might be—would need to be paid for in the Nangarhar political marketplace. This would require power and patronage, both of which could be easily purchased with profits from the drug trade. It could be predicted that democracy and drugs would become frequent bedfellows in a post-transition Nangarhar. Given the increasingly contested political space in which the state has failed to maintain a coalition of the provincial elite, it was hard to see how the insurgency would not gain further ground in Nangarhar in 2014.

4. Helmand: Turning Deserts into Flowers

4.1 Introduction to the situation in Helmand

Earlier reports by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) have shown that the former desert area north of the Boghra and south of Highway 1 (the *Dasht*) has changed significantly over the last decade (see Figure 9). This section considers a body of 602 qualitative interviews collected over six rounds of fieldwork over the last three years, along with findings from in-depth fieldwork conducted in the area north of the Boghra Canal in 2013.⁸⁷

This body of work shows not only a dramatic increase in the amount of land under cultivation in the area north of the Boghra Canal (from 891 hectares in 2002 to 35,501 hectares in 2012) but also significant changes in the social composition of the population and agricultural practices since the area first began to be settled in the mid-1990s. Household data show quite different patterns of settlement over the last decade, as land was commoditised and improved, and as a growing number of land-poor—no longer able to access land in the canal command area following a ban on opium poppy cultivation in the Helmand Food Zone—looked for land that they could cultivate in the former desert area north of the Boghra Canal.

It is difficult to assess how representative this sample is, given the challenges of conducting fieldwork in the former desert area north of the Boghra Canal, and therefore the paucity of even the most basic demographic statistics. However, the findings do correspond with earlier qualitative work on migration patterns conducted in this area in 2011 and subsequent fieldwork in the canal command area during 2012 and 2013, as well as other work conducted in Bakwa.

The initial research in this area showed that there had been three waves of migration. The first wave occurred during the 1990s and was rather limited in scale, consisting largely of farmers from Nawzad and Washir. The second began in 2002 and consisted of land grabs, primarily led by local commanders from within the canal command area. The third began in 2004 and was a product of the commoditisation of land north of the Nahre Boghra and its subsequent sale to other farmers.

A review of the household data collected over the last three years suggests that, although this characterisation of these three phases—limited land capture, commander-led land grabs and the commoditisation of land and land sales—was broadly accurate, the latter two phases overlapped. The data also suggest that, aside from these initial phases of land ownership, a further phase of settlement began to take full effect in 2009 and peaked in 2010. This phase consisted of a growing number of migrants arriving in the former desert area and obtaining land as either sharecroppers or tenant farmers (n293). The household data also mirror the remote sensing data which show a levelling off in the growth in the area under agriculture in the area north of the Boghra Canal since 2011.

This section offers a detailed assessment of the data and the patterns and processes of land settlement in the area north of the Boghra Canal, building on the earlier research. Drawing on qualitative interviews with farmers in this area, it also offers some explanation of the slowdown in the number of migrants to the area and in the rate of growth in agricultural land. It charts a process of agrarian transformation over the last decade that has been driven by developments in the canal command area, by the availability of improved technology and by the opportunities for economic advancement that opium poppy production has offered communities in what was a largely unpopulated desert area only ten years ago. It also shows how dependent this population is on the opium crop for its welfare and how fluctuations in yields and/or prices can have a significant impact on the population, not unlike those farmers located in the upper districts of Nangarhar.

⁸⁷ These data consist of in-depth interviews with a number of respondents in the former desert area north of the Nahre Boghra. The first round was in May 2011 and involved 87 respondents; the second was in November 2011 and involved 98 respondent; the third was in May 2012 and involved 110 respondents; the fourth was in November 2012 and involved 86 respondents; the fifth was in May 2013 and involved 105 respondents; and the final round was in November 2013 and involved 116 respondents. Earlier fieldwork was conducted in three research sites north of the Nahre Boghra in November 2010, involving 45 respondents, but unfortunately this did not include data on the year that those interviewed moved to the area. The data from this initial round of fieldwork have not been included.

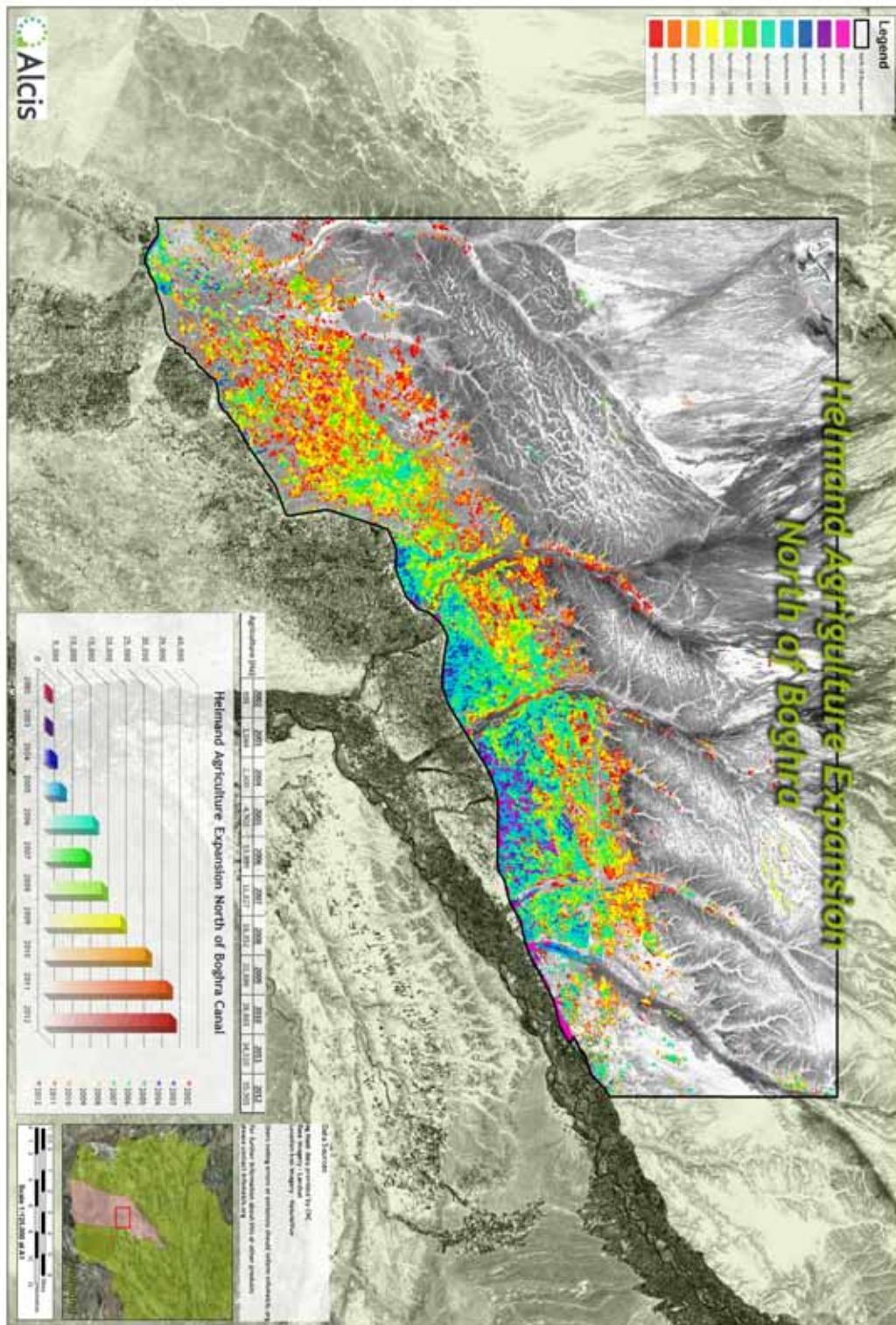


Figure 9: Helmund Agricultural Expansion North of Boghra.

4.2 What does the population look like?

There are profound challenges in the notion of an average farming household, given the sheer diversity in resource endowments, security regimes and patronage networks in rural Afghanistan, even over a short distance. As the previous section on Nangarhar has shown, comparing the upper areas of a district such as Achin with the lower areas means comparing an area that has quite different access to water, land, contrasting political orders and different histories of opium poppy cultivation in recent years.

Levels of insecurity in many parts of rural Afghanistan also tend to limit access for formal surveys to parts of the country where opium poppy has become concentrated in recent years. There is the added challenge that some of these hard-to-reach areas, such as the former desert areas in the south, have experienced dramatic transformation over the last few years that many official data collection tools have found it hard to keep up with. The Central Statistics Office village dataset, for example, does not acknowledge the degree to which the area north of the Boghra Canal has developed, citing only a small number of “village clusters” (see Figure 10) despite the expanse in the number of household compounds that can be found.⁸⁸ This means that the population in areas such as those north of the Boghra Canal—as with other former desert areas in places like Bakwa in Farah; Zahre, north of Highway 1; and SpinBoldak in Kandahar—are often underrepresented, if represented at all, by surveys like the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment.

⁸⁸ Formal village names are misleading in many of these former desert areas. Locally, people refer to every compound (qala) as a village (kalay). While households will support and group around a common mosque, it is not possible to impose the kind of social organisation and structures found in villages in the canal command area on communities in the former desert land.

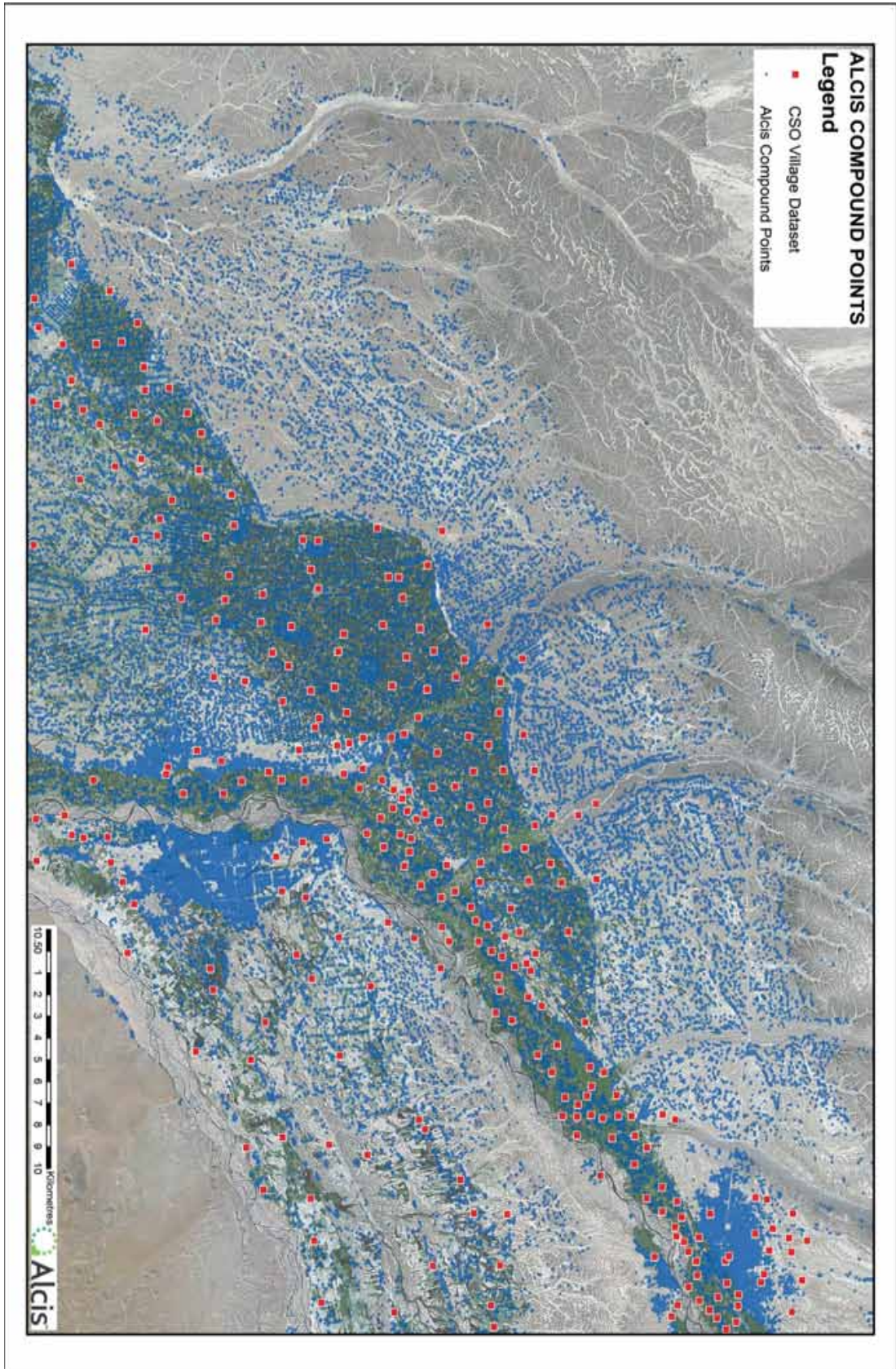


Figure 10: A comparison of the CSO village data set and actual household compounds as identified by Alcis using high resolution imagery

While acknowledging the challenges above, there are factors that make it easier to sketch the profile of a typical farming household in the area north of the Boghra Canal than in most parts of Afghanistan: the uniformity of the terrain during the 1990s and the early years of the Karzai regime, the way that the land was initially settled, the use of common agricultural technologies, the dominance of AGEs and the primacy of the opium crop in the agricultural system. Indeed, in terms of the amount of land cultivated and household composition, there does seem to be a broad consistency across different land tenure groups and locations covered by this research (see Table 2). For example, the average household typically cultivated almost 12 *jeribs* of land, and contained 9.6 household members, of whom 55 percent were children.

Extrapolating from these figures and the population density per *jerib* of agricultural land, this suggests a dramatic growth in the population in the area north of the Boghra Canal and south of Highway 1, from only 4,010 in 2002 to 159,756 in 2012.

Table 2: Household composition and land cultivated, by land tenure, location and landholding

	Land cultivated	Number of adults	Number of children	Total number of household members	Number of household members/ jerib	Children as percentage of household (%)	Sample size (N)
All	11.9	4.4	5.2	9.6	0.9	54.4	602
By Land Tenure							
Landowners (All)	11.7	4.3	5.3	9.5	0.9	55.3	309
Sharecroppers and tenant farmers	12.2	4.5	5.2	9.7	0.9	53.5	293
Landowners (purchased land)	11.4	4.3	5.3	9.5	0.9	55.2	247
Landowners (captured land)	12.8	4.3	5.4	9.7	0.8	55.6	62
Sharecroppers	12.4	4.5	5.1	9.6	0.8	53.7	248
Tenant farmers	11.3	4.6	5.3	9.9	1.0	52.8	45
By Research Site							
Dashte Ab Pashak	11.2	4.3	5.5	9.8	0.9	56.2	78
Shen Ghazai	12.2	4.5	5.7	10.2	0.9	56.4	80
Shna Jama	11.9	4.3	5.2	9.6	0.9	54.9	78
Shurawak	11.4	4.2	4.9	9.1	0.9	53.2	77
Nawabad	12.2	4.5	5.2	9.7	0.9	53.8	76
Dashte Shin Kalay	12.0	4.5	5.0	9.4	0.8	52.7	72
Loy Manda	12.0	4.5	5.2	9.7	0.9	53.4	66
Dashte Koshal Kalay	12.3	4.6	5.0	9.7	0.8	52.5	59
By Landholding							
<5 jeribs	4.9	3.0	4.0	7.0	1.4	56.6	23
<10 jeribs	7.1	3.6	4.5	8.1	1.2	55.6	144
>10 jeribs	13.4	4.6	5.5	10.1	0.8	54.1	458
>15 jeribs	16.8	5.0	6.0	11.0	0.7	54.6	194
>20 jeribs	21.6	5.5	6.3	11.8	0.6	53.2	32

Across this population there is clearly variance in the amount of land under cultivation and the number of household members. In particular, the amount of household land under cultivation from within the sample differs considerably, ranging from only four *jeribs* to 30 *jeribs*. Some households may own even more land and have other farmers work the land as tenants or sharecroppers. Some may leave the land idle either because it is *shagai*—rocky and not suitable for agriculture—or, as appears to be the case in the 2013-14 growing season, they are concerned about the prospect of further losses due to diminishing opium yields, as detailed in Section 4.6.

Figures suggest that the number of household members in this former desert area is relatively large and varies much less than the amount of agricultural land. For instance, only 17 percent of households were found to contain the national average of 7.4 household members or less.⁸⁹ As can be seen in Table 2, even those households with fewer than five *jeribs* of land under cultivation had on average seven household members, compared to an average household size of 11.8 for those with at least four times the amount of agricultural land. The number of household members per unit of agricultural land in these smaller farms, the high costs of production and low wheat yields in the former desert area all put increasing pressure on those with limited landholdings to cultivate relatively high-return crops like opium poppy. In fact, like those in the southern district of Nangarhar, it is these households with limited agricultural land that are the most likely to cultivate only opium poppy even when they face the risk of falling yields. For example, a household with five *jeribs* of land and seven household members would require 3.5 *jeribs* of land under wheat, assuming a yield of 80 *man*⁹⁰ per *jerib*, just to be able to be self-sufficient in bread.

There is, of course, the added challenge of land tenure arrangements which have a fundamental effect on the costs that a household will incur and the benefits that they will derive from a fixed unit of land. The many tenancy and sharecropping arrangements that are negotiated across a limited geographical area in rural Afghanistan mean that more needs to be known about how households access resources. It is particularly important to understand not just how much land a household cultivates and what crops they grow, but what share of the crop they ultimately receive in return for their efforts. In the area north of the Boghra Canal, land tenure arrangements appear to be intimately tied to the process of settlement, the history of which will be explored in Section 4.3.

4.3 Land settlement and tenure

Land grabbing: Getting something for nothing

Both remote sensing imagery and fieldwork suggest that very few farmers had settled in the area north of the Boghra Canal before 2001 (see Figures 9 and 11). Of the 602 farmers interviewed since May 2011, only three claimed to have moved to the *Dasht* before 2001, and none had paid for the land; they had, in their own terms, “captured” it. While reports from key respondents⁹¹ suggested that those farmers who had moved into the area during the years of the Taliban regime were said to have come from the *karez* (irrigated areas) of Washir and Nowzad to escape a period of prolonged drought, there was little to confirm this from those interviewed who had actually settled in the 1990s.⁹² An Ishaqzai Kutchi who had settled in *Dasht e Shin Kalay* in 1999 (#2), simply claimed, “In the past, this was our pasture land, now we cultivate it.” Neither of the other two respondents who had settled in the 1990s “before the Taliban government” offered any insights into where they had migrated from.

Figure 11 shows that the opportunity to “capture” land in this area at no cost increased during the initial years of the Karzai administration, peaking in 2003. One-tenth of those interviewed (n62) claimed that they had obtained the land without payment, settling in the area between 1996 and 2009. By 2010, this process of land captures had ended and all of those who settled in the area had either purchased the land or were working as sharecroppers or tenant farmers.

89 Central Statistics Office, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2014, 12.

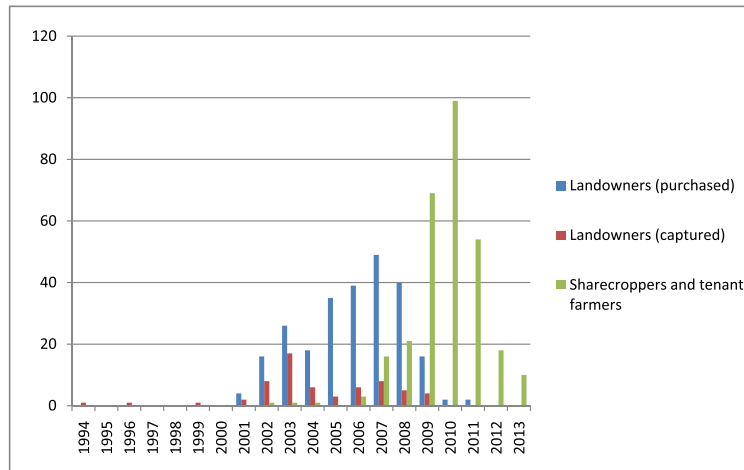
90 A man is the equivalent of 4.5 kilogrammes.

91 David Mansfield, “Between a Rock and Hard Place: Counter-narcotics efforts and their effects in Nangarhar and Helmand in the 2010-11 growing season” (Kabul: AREU, 2011), 22.

92 However, a number of respondents who arrived later stated that they were originally from Nowzad.

There was no discernible difference in the incidence of obtaining land without payment among the different sites covered by the fieldwork. Each of the research sites had a number of respondents who had obtained land without paying for it, although the latest of this group, who settled in 2009, could be found in Shurawak, the area furthest north from the Nahre Boghra, and one of the last areas to be settled, according to satellite imagery.

Figure 11: Year of settlement in area north of Boghra Canal, by land tenure



Those interviewed often distinguished between those who had captured the land themselves (n44) and those who had been given it by others (n12).⁹³ Those who had received the land from others had typically received it from local politico-military elites (referred to locally as “commanders”) who were alleged to have captured the land themselves. They were typically based just south of the canal and justified the land grab on the basis that they had a traditional claim to the *Dasht* land that lay adjacent to their village in the *watan*. This was the same argument that many respondents who had captured the land themselves used, commenting, “This is our village land.” Key respondents reported that the desert area was naturally divided by a number of dried river washes, known as *mandas*, some of them large (Loy Manda, Naray Manda and Ab Pashak Manda) and some of them much smaller. The respondents claimed that these *mandas* represented the boundaries between tracts of desert that had been claimed by communities and their political elites to the south of the Nahre Boghra.

Farmers claimed that the commanders who had captured the desert land had taken significant amounts of land for themselves and then distributed some of it to their extended families and subordinates. Many of these commanders were alleged to have had links to the provincial administration and then Governor Sher Mohammed Akhundzada. For example, the area known as Shna Jama was alleged to have been captured by Abdul Tahir Noorzai, a former security commander in Nad e Ali, during Akhundzada’s governorship, while the area around Naquilbad, including Nawabad Shawal, fell to Haji Kabir Khan, the former head of the traffic police in Lashkar Gah (see Table 3). Haji Qadoos, who is claimed to have taken the land in Dahte Ab Pashak, was the deputy commander of the 93rd Division of the Afghan Military Forces between 2001 and 2004, before the division was disbanded. He was then alleged to have formed a militia under contract to US Special Forces to guard Camp Price.⁹⁴

Those interviewed reported that the gifting of land by local commanders continued until as late as 2007, demonstrating that individuals with strong links to the government maintained some ownership over land north of the Nahre Boghra despite the growing influence of the Taliban in the area. In Shen Ghazia, for example, a number of farmers claimed that they had received land

⁹³ Six respondents simply reported that they did not pay anything for the land but they did not say whether they had been gifted it by others or “captured it” themselves.

⁹⁴ Deedee Derksen, “War and Peace: Armed, disarmed, rearmed: How Nahre Seraj in Helmand became one of the deadliest districts in Afghanistan” (Kabul: Afghan Analysts Network, 6 January 2014), 2-3.

as late as 2007 from Abdul Khaleq.⁹⁵

In some areas, the patronage of specific commanders and the claims of their tribes over the land were evident, due to the predominance of specific tribal groups among those interviewed (see Table 3). For example, two-thirds of those interviewed in Shen Ghazai were Alkozai, the same tribe as Commander Abdul Kaleq. In Shna Jama, 65 percent of those interviewed were Noorzai, as was the commander Abdul Tahir, who was accused of initially taking the land. The dominance of the Barakzai in Dasht e Ab Pashak and Loya Manda also corresponds with the tribal affiliation of commanders Haji Abdul Qatoos and Abdul Haq (now deceased) who were alleged to have captured the land in the early days of the Karzai administration.

Elsewhere a greater mix of tribes was present. In Dashte Shin Kalay and Dashte Koshal Kalay, where a more opportunistic process of land grabs was claimed to have been in effect, it was possible to find a much wider range of tribes, including shepherds known as *maldar* from both Baloch and Kakar tribes who claim traditional land use rights over the area. It is also clear that the influx of an increasing number of households taking land as tenants or sharecroppers was changing the tribal composition of some of the sites covered by this fieldwork.

The commoditisation of land and rising land prices

Parallel to the capture or gifting of was a process of land purchases, which—based on interviews with key respondents—appears to have begun in 2001. As can be seen in Figure 11, the number of respondents who had purchased land increased from 2002 until it peaked in 2007, although a small number of land purchases was evident as late as 2011. In the peak years of land purchases, between 2005 and 2008, the number of respondents buying land far outnumbered those who settled in the area through land captures or obtained land as sharecroppers or tenants.

Most of these respondents stated that land acquisition was based on existing contacts in the area. Almost all of those interviewed claimed to be from tribes indigenous to the southern provinces with a traditional presence in Helmand and links to the former desert area. The Noorzai (n186), Ishaqzai (n130), Barakzai (n121), Alkozai (n88), Alizai (n25) and Baloch (n20) made up almost 95 percent of the sample, with little variance across the different land tenure arrangements.⁹⁶ Those tribes that were not indigenous to Helmand but had been settled in the canal command area during the Helmand and Arghandab Valley Authority (HAVA) project in the 1960s and 1970s (locally referred to as the *naqel*) were reported to have been excluded from the area by the indigenous population; it was explained that the *naqel* “do not have a right” to the desert land.

⁹⁵ Moallem Mirwali was one of the nine parliamentary candidates that the Independent Electoral Commission ruled in favour of in August 2011, replacing Massud Noorzai as the Member of Parliament. Martine van Biljert, “A new result for the Parliamentary election?” 21.08.11 <http://aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=2032>

⁹⁶ The only exception was among tenant farmers where 88 percent of the sample was made up of respondents from these six tribes.

Table 3: Process of Land Settlement in Specific Research Sites North of the Boghra Canal

	Nature of Land Grab in 2002		Tribes among sample ¹
Shen Ghazai	Commander led - Abdul Khaliq (Alkozai)	Alkozai; Hezbe Islami with links to former 93rd Division Commander Moallem Mirwali. Currently wakil (village representative) of Kopaka.	N80 - Alkozai (67.5%), Noorzai (15%), Barakzai (8.75%) and Ishaqzai (8.75%)
Shna Jama	Commander led- Abdul Tahir (Noorzai)	Noorzai; former security commander for Nad e Ali. Killed in car accident in 2010.	N78 - Noorzai (65%) Ishaqzai (11.5%), Barakzai (7.7%) Alkozai (5.1%), Kharoti (3.8%), Suleimankhel (2.6%), Kakar (2.6%); and Baloch (1.3%).
Dashte Loy Manda	Commander led - Abdul Haq, known as 'Haji Amir' (Barakzai)	Barakzai; Hezbe Islami; Killed in 2008. Father Allaudin, was Wakil of the area; His brother Haji Malang is commander of ANP in Gereshk. Other brother Mohammed Haq in NDS.	N80 - Barakzai (56.25%), Noorzai (16.7%), Ishaqzai (16.25%), Alkozai (7.6%), Alizai (1.5%)
Dashte Ab Pashak	Commander led - Haji Abdul Qadoos (Barakzai)	Barakzai; former Commander Moallem Mirwali and Deputy of 93rd Division of Afghan Army (disarmed in 2004). Brother controls checkpoints between Ab Pashak and Gereshk	N78 - Barakzai (61.25%), Noorzai (14.1%) Ishaqzai (12.8%), Alkozai (7.7%), Alizai (3.8%)
Dashte Koshal Kalay	No single commander; opportunistic settlement by different tribes; police commanders from checkpoint at Shawal are alleged to have taken bribes from settlers		N59 - Ishaqzai (33.9%), Noorzai (23.7%), Baloch (13.5%), Alizai (8.5%), Kakar (8.5%), Barakzai (5.1%), Alkozai (3.4%), Popalzai (1.7%), Taimani (1.7%)
Nawabad e Shawal	No single commander but some initial influence of Haji Kabir Khan (Noorzai) ; opportunistic settlement by different tribes; police commanders from checkpoint at Shawal are alleged to have taken bribes from settlers	Haji Kabir Khan (Noorzai) previously from washir; former head of traffic police in Lashkar Gah, killed in 2008.	N76 - Noorzai (43.4%), Ishaqzai, (36.8%), Alizai (6.6%), Alkozai (5.3%), Barakzai (3.9%) Suleimankhel (2.6%), Kharoti (1.3%)
Dashte Shin Kalay	No single commander; settled by Kuchi (a nomadic group) in 2003 who claim the land as traditional pasture land.		N72 - Ishaqzai (40.2%), Noorzai (20.8%), Alizai (6.9%), Alkozai (6.9%), Baloch (6.9%), Kakar (6.9%), Barakzai (2.8%), Kharoto (2.8%), Suleimankhel 2.8%), Taimani (1.3%)
Shurawak	No single commander; initially inhabited by Noorzai from Washir and Nawzad		N77 - Noorzai (41.6%), Ishaqzai (18.9%), Barakzai (11.7%), Alkozai (10.4%), Alizai (6.5%), Baloch (6.5%), Kakar (2.6%), Suleimankhel (1.3%),

¹ Due to the small sample (n12), the research site for Abdul Aziz Kalay is not included in this table.

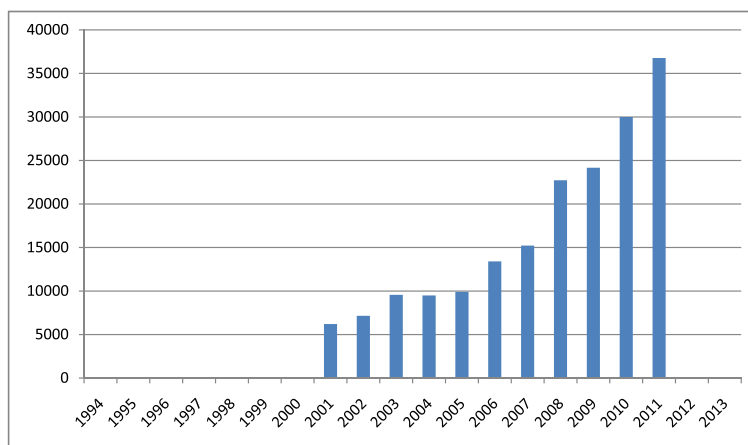
Those who had purchased land claimed to have been introduced to the area by family or friends already living north of the Nahre Boghra who helped them find and purchase it. Some of those interviewed even purchased land from family members, including their brothers or the families that their relatives married into. Others reported that they had worked in the area during the opium harvest season, the *nesh*, before deciding to relocate to the area. One respondent reported making the successful transition from seasonal harvester to sharecropper in 2002 to finally purchasing land in 2007, paying 100,000 PR for six *jeribs* of land and 50,000 PR for an additional four *jeribs*.⁹⁷

As Figure 12 shows, the data on land prices north of the Nahre Boghra reflect the growth in the number of land purchases that occurred between 2001 and 2008. Initially prices were low, at an average of 6,201 PR per *jerib* in 2001. This was for desert land, or, as some describe it “hard desert” that required clearing, levelling and application of fertiliser (both manure and chemicals). This land would also require a tubewell to irrigate crops and provide water for residents and any livestock they owned. Finally, any new migrants who purchased this desert land would also need to build a house to live in.

The initial two years of settlement were reported to be a difficult transition. Those who were used to living in the canal command area had access to water for both irrigation and consumption and well established gardens where they could shelter from the sun during the hot summer. The dry conditions, lack of transport, absence of health facilities, distance to a permanent bazaar (other than those bazaars that had been established on the Nahre Boghra),⁹⁸ and, to a much lesser extent, the lack of schools in the former desert area were particular hardships for those who had relocated. Despite this adversity, farmers moved north of the Nahre Boghra in search of land, the vast majority of them claiming that they did not have land elsewhere (n596).

Of course land prices varied by location, the quality of the soil, the purchaser’s relationship with the landowner, the quality of the land (whether it had been prepared or not) and the presence or absence of a tubewell and/or house. Aerial photography and fieldwork in the area showed a process of land improvements as some of the original settlers began to parcel off their land and sell it. For example, by 2004 and 2005, a small number of respondents purchased land that was already tilled and prepared for cultivation, and in a few isolated cases a tubewell had been sunk. By 2008, as many as half of those who had settled were purchasing land with both a tubewell and a basic house—perhaps just a compound wall—with some paying as much as 60,000 PR per *jerib*.⁹⁹ Average land prices had risen to 22,731 PR per *jerib*.

Figure 12: Land prices in the former desert area north of the Boghra Canal (PR per *jerib*)



97 Dashte Ab Pashak #5.

98 While over time there has been an increase in the numbers of weekly, temporary bazaars (*mela*), being held in the Dasht, the distance to both healthcare and a more permanent market for the purchase of agricultural items or food has made the purchase of a motorbike a necessity.

99 It is worth noting that in 2008 the PR depreciated against the US dollar, falling from 60 PR for US\$1.00, where it had been since 2001, to around 75 PR to US\$1.00.

By 2011, the last year for which respondents cited land prices, average land prices had risen to 36,772 PR per *jerib*, a sixfold increase compared to 2001.¹⁰⁰ This price rise was a reflection of both the greater incidence of farmers purchasing “improved land” and the growing pressure on the former desert land.¹⁰¹ By this stage, satellite imagery and aerial photography showed fewer areas that had not already been settled in the research sites. There were also reports from those in the area that former desert land used previously as locations for weekly markets, as well as desert roads, had been brought under agriculture. However, rocky land known locally as *shagai* continued to be unused; even though some farmers claimed that they owned significant parcels of this land, it was unfit for agriculture.

The influx of tenants and sharecroppers

Alongside the migration into the area north of the Nahre Boghra by purchasers was a movement of sharecroppers and tenant farmers making up almost half of the total sample (n293). In the initial years of the Karzai administration—as early as 2002—there were reports of a few isolated cases of people moving to the area to work land owned by others, but it was not until 2007 that the numbers began to pick up, and from 2009 on, the data show a rapid increase (see Figure 9). In 2008, then Governor Gulab Mangal launched the Helmand Food Zone and opium poppy cultivation within the canal command area fell from 33,937 to 21,452 hectares. One year later, there was a more than threefold increase in the number of sharecroppers or tenant farmer among the respondents. By 2010, almost one-sixth of the total sample (n99) fell into this category, and the number of migrants purchasing land had all but disappeared.

Fieldwork suggested that the migration of sharecroppers and tenant farmers was largely driven by events in the canal command area: the chronic insecurity and increased levels of violence in parts of central Helmand between 2008 and 2010¹⁰² and the progressive expansion of an effective ban on opium poppy imposed across parts of the districts of Nawa Baraka, Lashkar Gah, Nad e Ali and Marjah. The ban on opium appears to have been particularly important in driving the land-poor north into the former desert area. Once the production of opium—a particularly labour-intensive crop—was banned in the Food Zone, there were fewer opportunities for the land-poor to sharecrop or rent land; landowners could manage their own land, given the lower labour requirements of many of the licit crops that were substituted for opium poppy. Landless and land-poor farmers were further disadvantaged in that they were typically not entitled to, and the least likely to receive, the agricultural products the government distributed as part of the Food Zone initiative.

With less demand for tenants or sharecroppers in the Helmand Food Zone, the land-poor found it increasingly difficult to obtain land in the canal command area and with it the residence that is typically part of any sharecropping or tenancy arrangement. Those that had previously sharecropped land faced two choices. They could either remain in the canal command area, compete to obtain increasingly scarce plots of land and receive only one-fifth of the final yield of licit crops with relatively low returns, or they could relocate to the area north of the Nahre Boghra and try their chances there.¹⁰³

The household data for 2009 and 2010 (see Figure 11) suggest that an increasing number of those interviewed opted to relocate from the Food Zone to the former desert area, taking land there as sharecroppers (n248), or renting it (n45). The sharecropping arrangements were often less

100 By 2011, the PR had fallen to 86.7 PR per US\$1.00, compared with 63.8 PR per US\$1.00 in 2001. This meant that land prices had risen by 425% in dollar terms between 2001 and 2011.

101 This price compares favourably to land in the canal command area which can sell for between 500,000 to 700,000 PR per *jerib* and even as high as 900,000 PR per *jerib* in Loy Bagh (west). These prices are quite different from those reported by the Helmand Monitoring and Evaluation Programme, which cites prices considerably higher and makes no effort to break down data by unit costs and year of purchase, leading to significant inconsistencies in the data presented.

102 During fieldwork in 2009 and 2010, respondents reported numerous injuries and deaths across a range of different research sites in the canal command area. Mansfield et al., “Managing Concurrent and Repeated Risks” (2011), 28-33. Much lower levels of violence were reported in 2012 and 2013, and the nature of that violence had changed from being caught in the middle of an armed battle between AGE, GIRoA and foreign military forces to injuries and deaths caused by improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

103 “I came here because of poverty, to grow poppy. I have no interest with the Dasht but it is my obligation to find food for my family,” Shen Ghazai #7, May 2013.

favourable than in the canal command area; with landowners often offering one-quarter of the final opium crop compared to the one-third that farmers had received while growing opium poppy when they were in the Food Zone. A smaller group of farmers entered into an arrangement known as *lekha*, where they paid all the recurrent costs of production, including seeds, tractors, oxen, diesel fuel and all the labour costs for both for the weeding and harvest seasons, and gave one-seventh of the final crop to the landowner.

Tenancy was less frequent among respondents, making up only 15 percent of those within the sample who did not own land north of the Nahre Boghra and only eight percent of the sample as a whole. At a cost of around 60 *man* of wheat per *jerib*,¹⁰⁴ land rental appeared relatively inexpensive compared to the canal command area,¹⁰⁵ but the recurrent costs of production were often considered prohibitive. Tenants were expected to pay the entire cost of production for the land they leased—even the costs of repairing or replacing any water pumps or generators that broke down during the period of their lease.¹⁰⁶ As opposed to the seasonal nature of sharecropping arrangements, tenants were typically required to commit to the landowner for two to three years.

Once in the former desert, both sharecroppers and tenant farmers typically monocropped opium poppy, in the hope that by doing so they too would be able to afford a parcel of desert land in the near future, build a home and establish a permanent residence. As such, in many cases, the land-poor appear to have transitioned from a livelihood of mixed crops to exclusive farming of opium poppy. Farmers who sharecropped around 10 *jeribs* of land in the canal command area of Helmand in 2008 or 2009 were likely to allocate between four and six *jeribs* of land to opium poppy, depending on security and the terms of trade between wheat and opium. However, once relocated to the desert area, these farmers typically cultivated the same amount of land but allocated all of it to opium poppy.

In the 2010-11 growing season, when opium prices were high and yields were good, even those who had been sharecropping in the area north of the Nahre Boghra for a few years claimed to have been doing relatively well, compared to their life in the canal command area.¹⁰⁷ They reported buying meat and fruit twice a week, or each time they went to the *mela* (the market);¹⁰⁸ some claimed to have sufficient cash with which to get treatment for family members in Kandahar, or even to purchase a motorbike.¹⁰⁹ Despite this, household data show fewer households settling in the area north of the Nahre Boghra to sharecrop and lease land compared to the peak years of 2009 and 2010. In parallel with remote sensing imagery for 2012, the household data show that those wishing to settle in that area still kept coming - even as late as the fall of 2013, despite reports of significant reductions in opium yields; they just did so in smaller numbers.

104 A small number of farmers reported paying rent in cash at a rate of between 8,000 and 10,000 PR per *jerib*. One respondent interviewed in May 2011 paid rent in opium at a rate of 0.5 *man* per *jerib*.

105 Tenant farmers were less prevalent in the canal command area in the 2012-13 growing season than they had been when opium was grown. Rental rates were similar in areas like Koshal Kalay and Khwajar Babar and Marjah F4D5 where wheat and maize were the dominant crops at 60 to 65 *man* per *jerib*, but yields were nearer 180 to 210 *man* per *jerib* compared to only 80 to 100 *man* per *jerib* in the former desert land. In areas closer to the provincial centre where there was greater agricultural diversification, such as Ayanak, tenant farmers appeared to be even scarcer and rents were higher, at 80 to 90 *man* per *jerib*.

106 When tenants paid for the replacement of generators or water pumps, they could take these items with them at their end of their lease.

107 This was not the case for those who had arrived that year.

108 "If I compare my life to when I was in the lower part, my life is good. Now we have enough food," Shen Ghazai #13, November 2011. "Life is better due to poppy and the presence of the Taliban. If there were no Taliban, the poppy would be banned like under the canal," Dashte Shin Kalay #12, November 2011. "My food is better, my children study in the mosque, I have money for medicine," Dashte Koshal Kalay #9, November 2011.

109 Mansfield, "Rock and a Hard Place," 28-29.

4.4 The institutions of governance in the *Dasht*¹¹⁰

Community structures north of the Boghra largely reflect the more tribally mixed villages that can be found across large parts of the canal command area. As mentioned earlier, a major difference is the absence of tribal groups that would not be considered locally as “indigenous” to Helmand: those whom local residents refer to as the *naqel*. Household data suggest that the *naqel* are few in number (n16) north of the Boghra Canal and are typically not welcome in the desert land by the Ishaqzai, Noorzai, Barakzai, Alkozai, Alizai, Baloch, and formerly nomadic Kakar, who have claimed the land as their own.¹¹¹ Some *naqel* have rented land but have not been able to own it because of their status as “outsiders” in central Helmand. This issue has led to growing resentment among the *naqel* in the canal command area, given the counternarcotics campaign in the Food Zone and the increasing concentration of opium production north of the Boghra Canal.¹¹²

With the commoditisation of land and the influx of new migrants, the patronage networks that shaped the initial settlement of the *Dasht* have been diluted, particularly in the more recently settled areas some distance from the canal. It is increasingly kinship and amity that shape these communities. These links are important, as in the initial year a new migrant will need a support in establishing his farm and home. The degree of support needed from fellow villagers will depend on the type of land acquired. If it is the cheapest desert land which has not been cleared and does not have a tubewell, a new migrant will need help with building a house and irrigation. Although one who buys, rents or sharecrops land that has already been improved will need much less support, he will still typically go to an area where he already has an established contact.

North of the Boghra, communities were typically structured around a common mosque frequented by about 15 to 20 households. As in the canal command area, the mosque and the *mullah* who ran it had become a focal point of the community. The *mullah* was paid for his services to the community in the form of an agricultural tithe, often generically referred to as *ushr*. In contrast to the canal command area, the prevalence of opium poppy north of the Boghra Canal meant that the *mullah* received only one-twentieth of the total yield of the land compared to one-tenth in the area south of the canal (although in both areas there was a tendency to pay an amount that “will keep Mullah saheb happy.” Village elders existed in these communities but none were recognised as *maliks* or *wakils* (village representatives) by the local community as there was no government to mediate with. Nor did there appear to be any large landowning chiefs of sub-tribes (*khan khels*) dominating the political landscape. Any disputes between villagers were initially referred to the *mullah* and any elders (*spinghiri*) in the community to resolve. If the dispute could not be resolved locally, it was referred to the Taliban.

The Taliban were present throughout the *Dasht*; they were, after all, said to be from within the local community.¹¹³ However, armed Taliban had become more circumspect since the uptick in military operations in 2012. In 2012 and 2013, international military forces and the ANS conducted a number of military operations in the area, particularly in the communities immediately adjacent to the Nahre Boghra and pushing further north into Shna Jama and Shurwak near to Camps Bastion and Leatherneck. Indeed, in comparison to previous rounds of fieldwork, farmers interviewed for this study reported an increase in forays across the canal by the ANSF in both 2012 and 2013: a view that International Security Assistance Force data would support (see Figures 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17). There were also more reports of helicopter missions, especially during the night, which led to a growing sense of insecurity among the population, particularly in Shen Ghazai and Dashte Loy Manda. Many commanders of the Afghan Local Police from the areas just south of the Boghra in the canal command area were seen as malign actors whose only interest was to intimidate the population and “loot their houses.”

110 This section is largely drawn from Mansfield, “All Bets are off” but is updated based on fieldwork in 2013.

111 It was alleged that some *naqel* had purchased land north of the Boghra but lied about their tribal affiliation, as they know this would lead to conflict with people from tribes that consider themselves indigenous to Helmand.

112 The *naqel* are some of the first to call for a comprehensive ban on opium across Helmand, arguing that if opium poppy is banned in the canal command area it should also be eradicated in the area north of the Boghra Canal.

113 As one respondent put it, in a matter-of-fact manner: “My two brothers are Talibs,” Dashte Shin Kalay #13, May 2013. Key respondents commented, “Where do you think the Taliban come from—the sky?”

Indeed, evidence showed that the vast majority of those north of the Boghra had lived in government-controlled territory at some stage and had nothing but contempt for the provincial and local authorities. Those who had left the canal command area and were located north of the Boghra Canal largely saw the government as weak, cowardly and without honor: *bei ghairat*. There were repeated references to the government as the “slave of the foreigner”¹¹⁴ and continued allusions to the un-Islamic behaviour and beliefs of those employed in the central and provincial administrations.

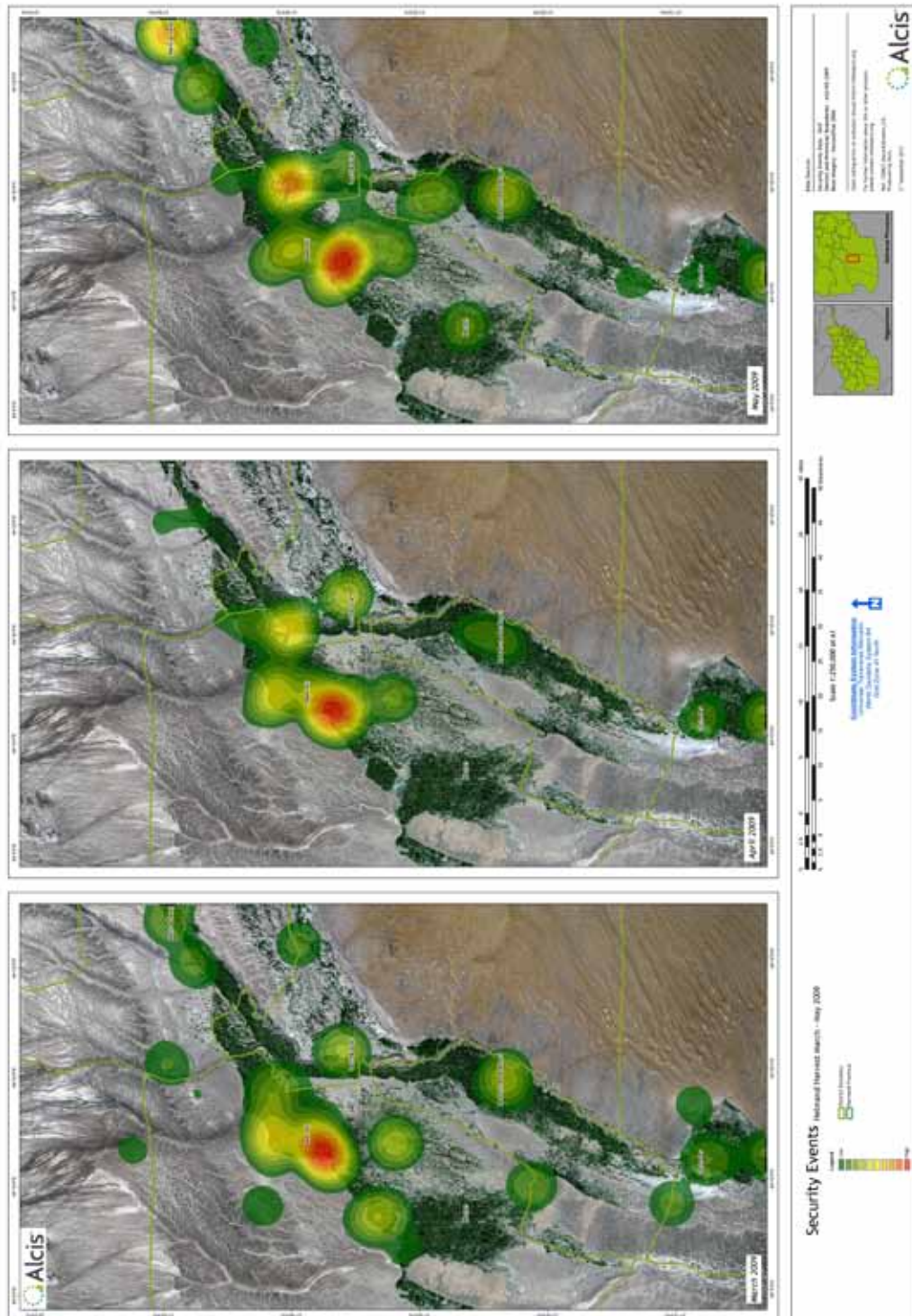
Former Governor Mangal was a target of much of the opprobrium of those interviewed especially those who had migrated from the canal command area in the last three years. He was largely criticised as being responsive to the interests of the military of the United Kingdom and the United States and viewed as acting independently of the government in Kabul. The perception that Governor Mangal was quick to react to foreign interests and to neglect the concerns of rural Afghans, was captured in the repeated use of the terms *murdagow* (a man who sells women for sex), *dowus* (someone who allows the women of his household to behave without honour or shame) and *kosai* [prostitutes].¹¹⁵ More profane terms were often used, as were the threats of violence, some of a sexual nature, made against the Governor and anyone working in the government.¹¹⁶ While locally this profanity might be considered part of the *washi*—the wild culture of the Helmandi—it also reflects the growing anger toward the government.

114 “All the people of the government are the sons of Obama,” Shen Ghazai #4, May 2013. “The government people don’t have authority. They just sit as labourers of the kafir [non-Muslims]. They are the sons of the donkey,” Dashte Loy Manda #2, May 2013. “F*** the wife of the government from Kabul to Helmand. They don’t have any power and will be moved from this area,” Dashte Loy Manda #4, May 2013. “The sons of the kafir [referring to the government] just do those things which the badar (slave owner) tells them to,” Dashte Shin Kalay #3, May 2013. “The government are under the hand of the foreigners. Here there is the good government of the Taliban,” Dashte Koshal Kalay #2, May 2013. “The enemy of Islam destroyed our crop and Allah will destroy them,” Shna Jama #6, May 2013. “The dowus people who are in the government are slaves. I f*** their mother; they are not Muslims,” (Nawabad Shawal #4, May 2013).

115 “Because of these *murdagow* we are poor,” Shna Jama #6, May 2013. “Don’t talk about this Kharkus government. All the problems are created by these *dowus*,” Shna Jama #10, May 2013. “[The government] is *dowus* and doesn’t think about the nation,” Nawabad Shawal #3, May 2013. “The *chawarki* [government authorities] are the sons of the *kosai*, I don’t have interest with them,” Dashte Shin Kalay #4, May 2013.

116 There is not a good person in the government. F*** the wife of the Wali by a donkey because they destroyed the crop,” Dashte Loy Manda #3, May 2013.

Figures 13 Security events Helmand March- May 2009



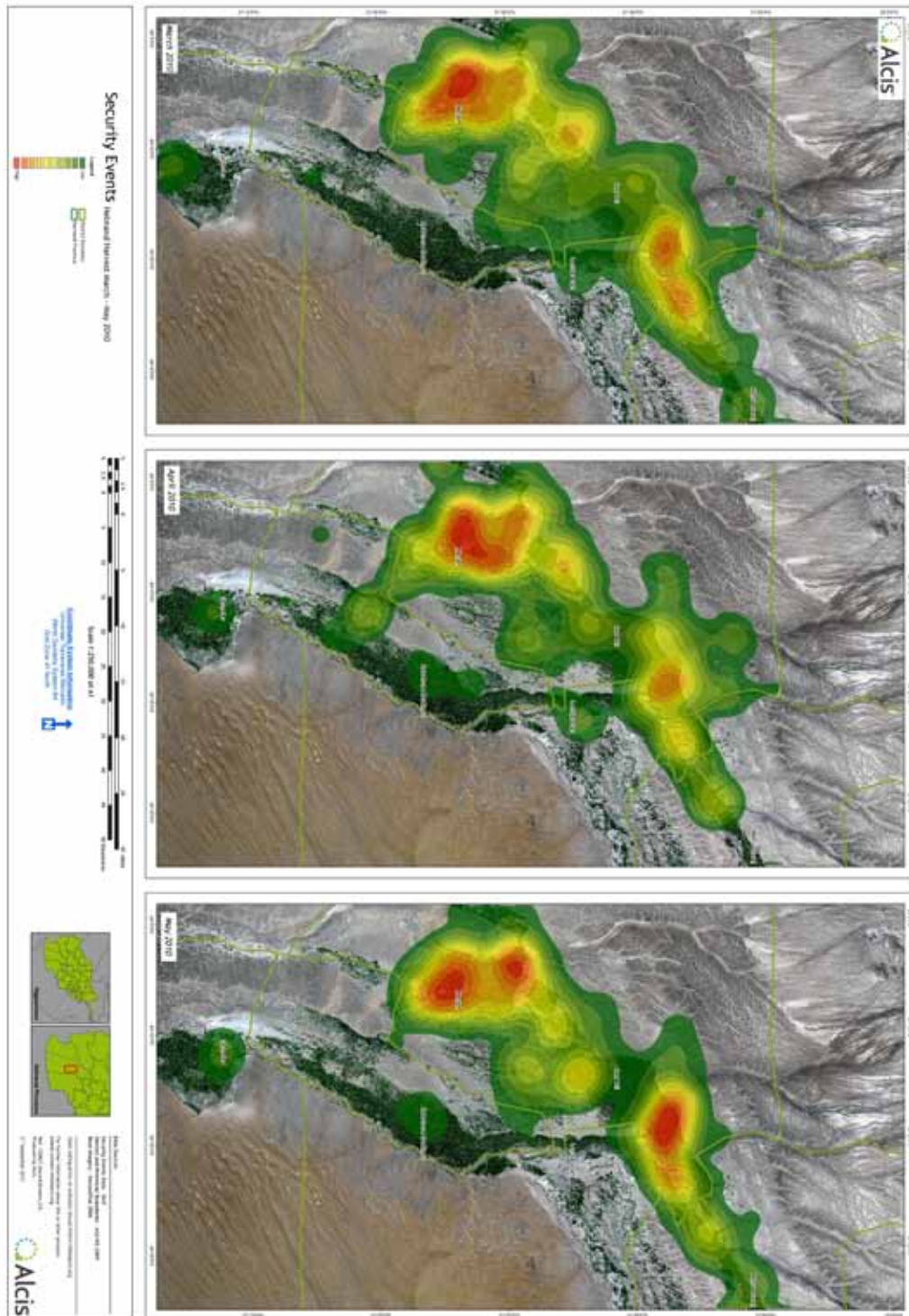
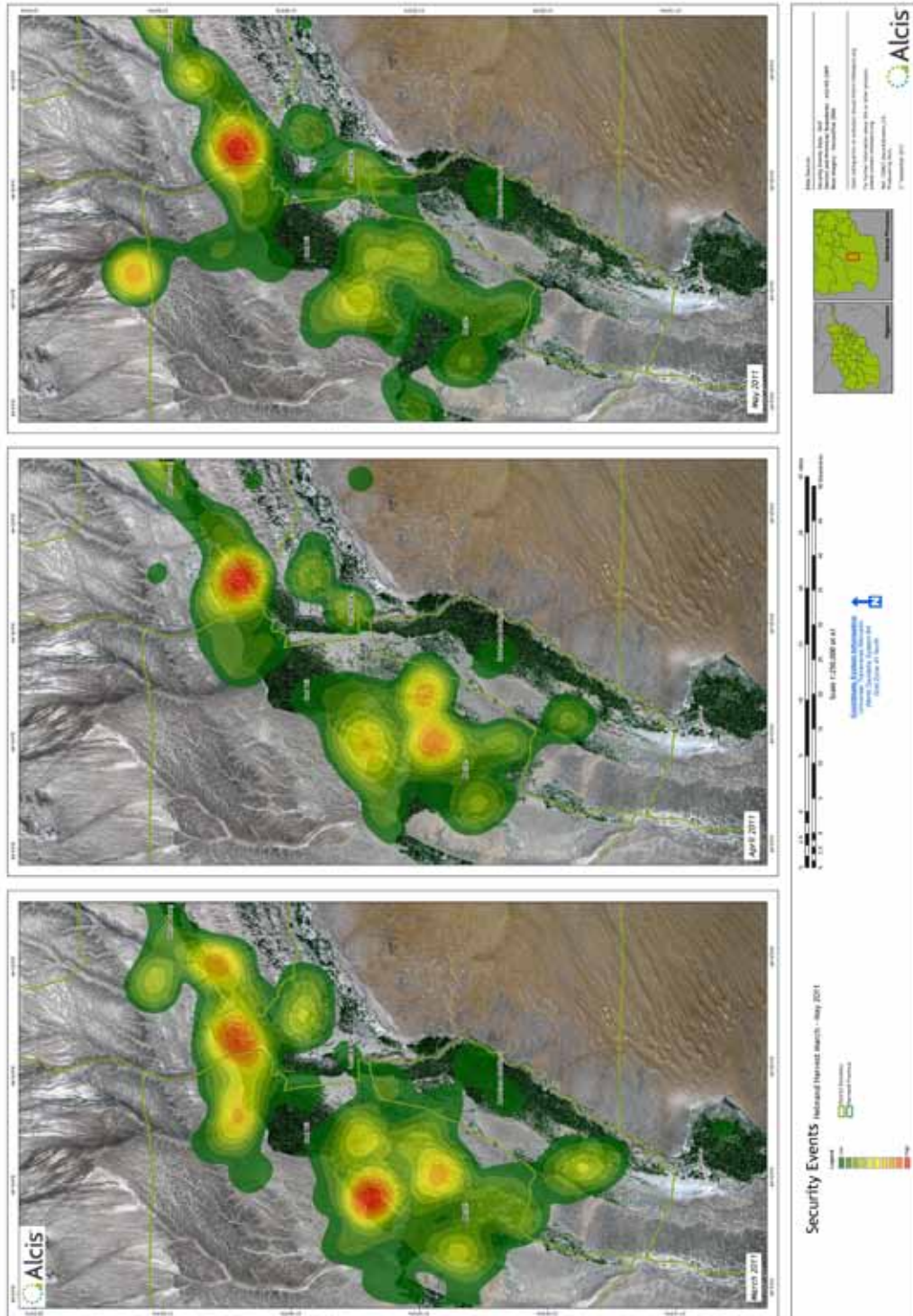


Figure 14 Security events Helmand March- May 2010

Figure 15 Security events Helmand March- May 2011



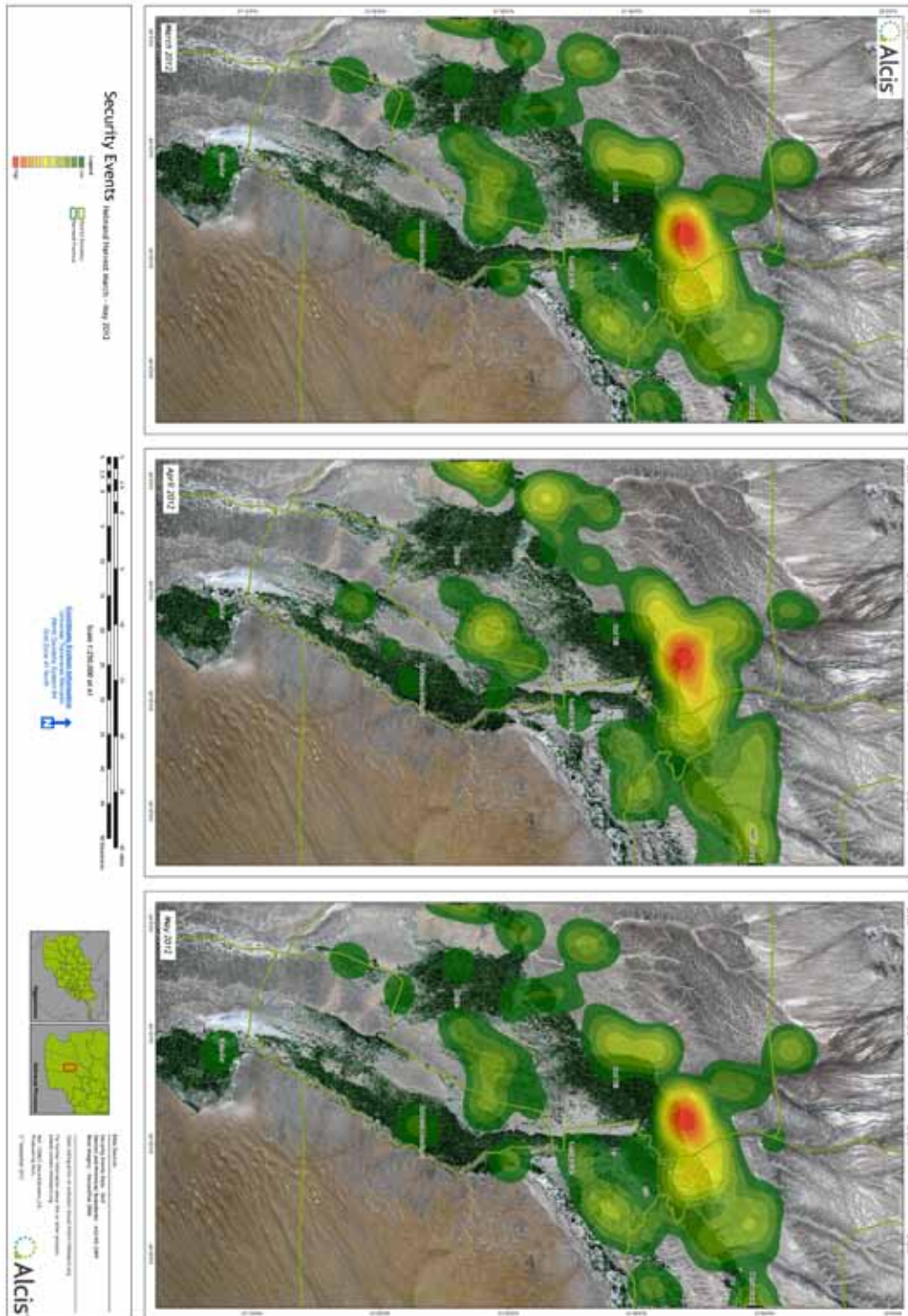
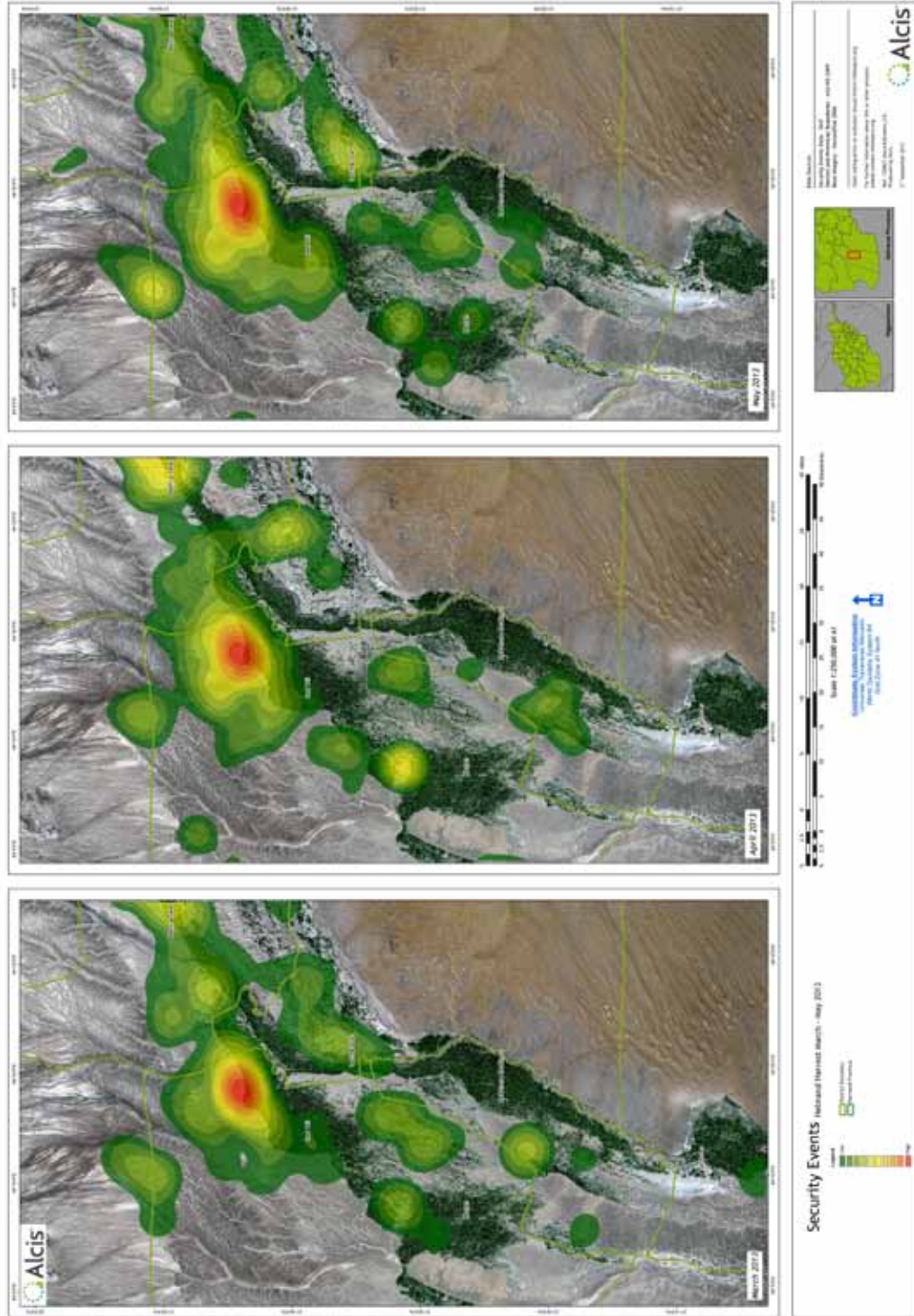


Figure 16 Security events Helmand March- May 2012

Figure 17 Security events Helmand March- May 2013



The counternarcotics campaign in particular appeared to have won the Taliban considerable support among the population north of the Boghra Canal. Many recent migrants to the area had direct experience of losing their crop during previous eradication campaigns in the canal command area, or had been coerced not to plant opium in the past. Efforts by Gulab Mangal to direct the eradication force into the area north of the Boghra in 2012 only made matters worse; it gave the Taliban the opportunity to present themselves as protecting rural Afghans from the predatory behaviour of the Afghan state and its foreign backers.¹¹⁷ The destruction of an estimated 21 tractors near Nawabad Shawal on 19 April 2012 was particularly unpopular amongst the population north of the canal.¹¹⁸ Allegations of corruption, reports of the Nad e Ali District Governor's relief at the curtailment of the eradication campaign, and the act of sabotage itself reinforced existing perceptions of the nature of the Afghan state and increased local support for the Taliban both north and south of the Boghra Canal.¹¹⁹

In the 2012-13 growing season, the new Governor Naeem Baloch¹²⁰ pursued the same strategy, directing ALP forces into the desert area during the planting season in an attempt to deter the planting of poppy. Although the campaign was limited—running between 19 and 22 November and extending only one kilometer from the Boghra Canal—it provoked considerable resentment. Those in the former desert area complained bitterly about the campaign and made repeated references to the “dogs” that were responsible. Governor Baloch was accused of delegating the campaign to the ALP with no consideration as to how the operation would be conducted and caring little for the behaviour of those who implemented it.

Locally, these incursions into the area north of the canal were seen as part of wider effort by the state and its representatives to prey on the rural population. Accusations of corruption and the looting of houses were common. For example, one farmer in Shen Ghazia reported having to pay 20,000 PR to get his generator returned.¹²¹ In Kopak, near Shen Ghazai, a local policeman, under the tutelage of an ALP commander, was alleged to have offered 30 to 40 generators seized during the campaign and stored at the police checkpost for sale to a respondent. He was quoted as saying, “Bring 300,000 PR and you can take all of these machines.”¹²² While the *Dasht* north of the Boghra Canal largely escaped the provincial government's Governor-led Eradication campaign in the spring of 2013¹²³ with the concerted targeting of Trek Nawa further south, the local perception was of a more comprehensive campaign of crop destruction based on “spraying of medicine” (see section 4.4), which further increased the population's hostility to Governor Baloch and the Afghan Government.¹²⁴

117 Mansfield, “All Bets are off”.

118 “This year [the government's] mother was f***ed by the Taliban as all their tractors were burned,” Owner/cultivator, 14 jeribs, arrived 2001, Shurawak. “The government announced poppy is haram and not to cultivate it, but what can they do? The eradication team came but they left like a dog,” Nawabad Shawal, 15 jeribs, sharecropper (1/4), Noorzai, arrived 2010.

119 A number of stories were circulating about the destruction of the tractors in Nawabad Shawal. One rumour was that the tractors were not destroyed by the Taliban but by local community members. This version of events claimed that the eradication team received payment in return for leaving the tractors inadequately protected. Another rumour attributed the destruction to the Taliban, reporting the use of rocket-propelled grenades and small arms fire in the attack. Finally there was the report of the District Governor of Nad e Ali's relief on hearing that the tractors had been destroyed and that he would no longer need to continue to direct the eradication effort into the difficult terrain north of the canal: “This way we finish the job in one night!”

120 Naeem Baloch was appointed Governor of Helmand in September 2012 following the dismissal of Gulab Mangal by President Karzai. BBC, “Karzai sacks Helmand Governor Gulab Mangal,” 20 September 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-19660292>.

121 “At the time of planting the sons of donkeys captured my water pump. I paid them 20,000 PR to get it back,” Shen Ghazai #7, May 2013.

122 Shen Ghazia #5, December 2012.

123 Only two respondents located alongside the canal, both in Dashte Koshal Kalay, complained that their crop had been destroyed by the eradication in the spring of 2013. One commented: “I f*** their mother, they are just able to beat poor people like me. F*** the wife of the government people because they tried to kill me and my family,” Dashte Koshal Kalay #9, May 2013.

124 “I never liked this government, but this year I became more opposed to them as this year they destroyed my life,” Nawabad Shawal #6, May 2013. “This Governor is a bigger murdagow than Mangal. All the dasht people have become poor and he sits quiet. [Baloch] doesn't think about these people,” Dashte Loya Manda #1, May 2013. “I didn't see the Governor. Who is he? If he is for the people he will ask about the people. Each day here [in the Dasht] two to three people are killed by foreigners. I f*** the mother of such government people and the foreigners,” Nawabad Shawal #13, May 2013. “The Americans] always say they keep peace but they destroy peace. They destroy our crop and our life is now very poor,” Dashte Shin Kalay #3, May 2013.

In such an environment there was little the Taliban needed to do to win the support of the population as long as the central government and provincial administration did not change their behaviour.¹²⁵ Where the government and its foreign backers were seen as responsible for the deteriorating economic position of the local farmers, the Taliban were portrayed as responding to the plight of the farmers, offering protection against those who were bringing both the military campaign and the opium ban across the canal.

Further, the Taliban were seen as responsive to the widespread economic losses due to the low yields in the 2012-13 growing season. For example, there were reports that the Taliban had reduced the amount of “tax” that they collected on the opium crop following the widespread crop failure. Fieldwork in December 2013 confirmed that farmers were paying only one *khord* (about 112.5 grams) per *jerib* of opium poppy cultivated, compared to the two *khord* per *jerib* that had been the “rule”¹²⁶ in previous growing seasons.¹²⁷ Other payments, such as the “tax” of 200 PR per *jerib* on wheat cultivation was also said to have been suspended, and a number of respondents claimed that they did not pay anything to the Taliban (or the *mullah*) following the particularly low yields in 2013.

Other incidents referred to by respondents in 2013 also presented an image of a Taliban whose rule in the area was dominant but not absolute. One example was of three tankers that a local Taliban commander had seized in April 2013, taking the diesel and burning the trucks. It was claimed that the diesel was subsequently to be sold to traders in Gereshk, prompting an outcry by local farmers¹²⁸ in Shen Ghazai. It was said that farmers approached the local Taliban commander and complained, “We are the people that feed you, you should sell the diesel to us,” and that the commander then defaulted on his deal with the traders in Gereshk. This narrative of a present and responsive Taliban is in stark contrast to the kind of presence that farmers would refer to in Helmand in 2009, and particularly in Marjah in 2010, when there was said to be an influx of “foreign” (primarily Pakistani) fighters.

Ultimately the Taliban appeared to be viewed favourably within the area north of the Boghra Canal, primarily because they were not the government but also because they allowed opium poppy to be cultivated in the area. The farmers in the *Dasht* largely viewed their lives as having improved due to the Taliban’s control of the area, with its efforts to exclude government forces from the area and resist the ban on opium poppy.

4.5 The adoption of new agricultural techniques

In addition to the changes in the social composition of those settling in the area north of the Nahre Boghra, marked changes in agricultural practices have taken place over the last decade. Cultivation techniques have not remained static but have been shaped by the availability of new technologies that have not only allowed desert land to be brought under cultivation in the first place but also supported the better use of labour. These technologies have become increasingly important as farmers have begun to specialise in opium poppy cultivation. High labour costs and lower yields have become a relatively common occurrence in this area since the harvest of 2010, occurring three years out of the last four.

Better water management

The most obvious change in agricultural techniques over the last decade—the move from shallow wells (*bawre*) to deep wells (*barma*)—has been documented in previous AREU reports.¹²⁹ The adoption of this new technology has allowed farmers to move into desert land and bring more of it

125 “The government people cannot come here; we do not accept them. We have the Islami Emirati,” Shurawak#2, May 2013. “There is no American government here, we have the Islami Emirate,” Shurawak #1, May 2013.

126 David Mansfield, “Taxation’ in Central Helmand and Kandahar (Kabul, unpublished briefing paper for FCO, March 2013).

127 The finding of a payment of two *khord* per *jerib* is also in line with the work of the Etihad project. See Donald Bray, “The opium trade in Nahre Seraj” (unpublished Network Report, 8 November 2011).

128 One version of this story tells of Haji Daud, a rival trader with land and a shop near Shen Ghazai, as the main protagonist behind this incident.

129 Mansfield and Fishstein, “Eyes Wide Shut”; Mansfield. “All Bets are off.”

under cultivation. Opium production has facilitated this process, providing the capital to purchase land and establish tubewells, as well as the revenue needed to meet the high recurrent costs of production: purchasing diesel fuel and maintaining and replacing generators and water pumps.

Locally it is claimed that there was a growing awareness of deep-well technology in the early 1990s, largely due to the efforts of NGOs to provide potable water. With the onset of drought in the late 1990s, as both shallow wells and *karez*es in the south became increasingly dry, farmers turned to deep wells as a way of improving their access to irrigation.¹³⁰ Low-cost water pumps and generators produced in Pakistan and subsequently in China also made deep-well technology more affordable

In central Helmand and Bakwa in the province of Farah, it was claimed that the equipment needed to drill the wells commercially was first brought into Pakistan by local traders who saw the market potential. Indeed, many of those who drilled deep wells in Helmand learned their trade in Balochistan in the early part of the 21st century. When they returned to Afghanistan, they offered their services to the population in former desert areas both south and north of the Nahre Boghra. (Others acquired their skills in Zabul, Kabul and Logar.) As time passed and a growing number of people saw the money that could be made from drilling wells—particularly between 2006 and 2011—there was a proliferation of the number of businessmen entering this market and “yards” were established for those drilling wells in both Lashkar Gah and Bolan.¹³¹

There has been some speculation that there are limits to the amount of land that can be brought under sustainable agricultural production by relying on deep well technology. There are countless reports in both Afghanistan and Pakistan of the widespread use of tubewells driving down the water table, raising questions about the sustainability of the agricultural practices being adopted by farmers in the desert areas north of the Nahre Boghra.

Interviews with farmers in these areas made it clear that they were aware of the risks to the water table that deep well technology presents. Most argued that the water table had fallen somewhere between 0.40 metre to one metre per year and estimated that it was between 13 and 18 meters in 2013. They blamed the drop in the water table on the proliferation of deep wells in the desert area. To compensate for further reductions in the ground water, households sank wells from 65 to 90 metres deep. With costs of drilling ranging from as low as 550 PR to 650 PR per metre and no possibility of re-drilling a well that is too shallow, this initial outlay was viewed to be a relatively low-cost way of ensuring a reliable water supply for some years to come.

Better management of labour

As the previous section shows, landholdings north of the Nahre Boghra are relatively large compared to national averages, and considerably larger than the areas of concentrated poppy production in the southern districts of Nangarhar. Since 2011, opium poppy has been increasingly monocropped in the area, following the influx of sharecroppers since 2010, the dramatic increases in opium prices that accompanied low opium yields in 2010, and the surge in both international and domestic military forces.

There are high labour costs associated with such widespread cultivation of opium, given the labour intensity of the opium crop and the relatively high rural wages in Afghanistan, particularly for weeding and harvesting opium poppy. For landowners, sharecropping is one way of reducing the labour costs associated with opium production. For both landowners and those who work the land of others, another cost-lowering approach has been the use of herbicides during the weeding season. Interviews in 2013 revealed that herbicides were being used by the vast majority of farmers in the former desert area, as well as by a growing percentage of those growing poppy in the canal command area. Most of those interviewed had only begun to use the herbicides in the last two to three years.

¹³⁰ It was also reported that the water from deep wells is less salty than that from the shallow wells, and therefore better for irrigation and consumption by the household.

¹³¹ There are about 10 “yards” in Bolan in the new bazaar on the left bank of the river. Traders report that, following a rapid expanse in supply and a cumulative increase in the number of people who have had deep wells sunk, there is now a reduction in the amount of work available, further supporting the data suggesting a slowdown in the rate of expansion in agricultural land and settlement north of the Nahre Boghra.

The dissemination of knowledge about the efficacy of herbicide use appears to have followed a path similar to that of deep well technology. The main protagonists were a growing number of businessmen in the provincial bazaars of Gereshk and, Lashkar Gah, importing herbicides from Iran, Pakistan and China over the last decade. Initially, herbicides such as 2,4D and Paraquat were largely applied to wheat. However, the last five years have seen more experimentation among farmers cultivating poppy, particularly in the areas north of the Nahre Boghra. Those selling herbicides in the provincial and district bazaars reported that their businesses were booming in 2013 as a larger number of farmers became aware of the benefits of applying herbicides. Traders and farmers said that the demands were so great that prices rose just prior to the winter as more farmers looked to purchase herbicides and supplies began to run low.

Among farmers there was a consensus that herbicides were an effective part of plant husbandry for opium, reducing the need for hired labour and the demands on family labour during the spring. Indeed, farmers reported that their children were “happy to be freed from the task of weeding” during the spring months. Traditionally opium poppy required weeding on three separate occasions and required considerable family labour or hired labour at a cost of 350 PR per day in the spring of 2013. With herbicides, the opium crop required only one application before the crop was thinned and the fields cleared of any dead plants. Respondents explained that herbicides were typically applied to the crop in the early spring when only three to four leaves of the opium poppy plant were showing; they were applied using a 20-litre backpack sprayer known locally as a “bomba.”¹³² To reduce exposure and inhalation, farmers might cover their face with a cloth or their *patoos* (shawls), but the face masks and gloves provided with some of the products were rarely worn. The standard measure for most of the fertilisers applied was around one-half litre for one *jerib* of land. Paraquat is mixed with water at a rate of 150 ml for 20 litres of water.

A variety of trade-named products were being sold in Helmand, including Paraquat, Pujing, Puma, Gramoxone, and Topic (see Table 4). Farmers who were unfamiliar with the trade names simply referred to products based on their packaging such as “the green bottle” (Pujing), or “the bottle with the red lid” (Iranian-made Paraquat). Based on interviews with both farmers and those selling the herbicides in the cities of Lashkar Gah and Gereshk, Paraquat, manufactured in Iran or China, was the brand most commonly used on the opium crop. In the last two years, China was also producing trade-named products under the names of Afghan trading companies such as Durukhshan Agricultural Social Association and Farahi Trading.

Further developments could be seen in the ways in which farmers applied herbicides to kill the weeds without damaging their crops. When farmers first began to experiment with herbicides, they protected the plants that were to be kept by covering them with the plastic lid of the product or a cup. These items would then be removed after the herbicide was applied and placed on plants in another part of the field until the entire area was covered. As farmers became more experienced, they turned to straw or sand to cover the plants that they wished to protect, washing the covers away when the field was irrigated ten days later. It is claimed that some of the new products that only recently became available on the market, such as “Tapek,” will only attack weeds and do not require the opium crop to be covered, thereby further reducing the labour inputs into the weeding process.

Herbicides are one of a number of agricultural practices that have been adopted by farmers in the former desert area of Helmand over the last few years as they look to increase their yields and better manage resources. Both farmers and other key respondents reported that these new agricultural practices were in part a function of the availability of new technologies as entrepreneurs have begun to import and sell more products such as herbicides, drilling rigs and solar panels in provincial and district bazaars. The uptake of these new technologies, however, is primarily driven by farmers’ experimentation and dissemination both within and between communities. Locally, those who claim that drug traffickers are behind the dissemination of these new technologies are seen as ignorant of the exposure that the population had to improved farming practices in neighbouring countries during the 1990s and through ongoing migration, as well as of the dramatic increase in the availability of new agricultural technologies in Afghanistan

132 These are made in either Korea or China and cost 3,000 Af\$ (about US\$52) and 1,200 Af\$ (about US\$21) respectively.

since 2001. Such claims are also viewed as neglecting the capacity of farmers and local traders to adapt and take up new practices in response to changing circumstances—such as drought or land settlement—when these practices have proven viable.

Table 4: Herbicides used on opium in the area north of the Boghra Canal

Brand	Price	Chemicals	Manufacturer	County
Paraquat (China)	1600 PR/litre	1,1 Dimethyl -1-4,4 bipyridinium dichloride	Sahrai	China
Paraquat (Iran)	650 PR/litre	1,1 Dimethyl -1-4,4 bipyridinium dichloride	Behavar	Iran
Power Puma	1800 PR/Litre		Farahi	China
Topic	1500 PR/litre	Clodiafop poropargyl	Syngenta	China
Tappek	1800 PR/litre	Clodiafop poropargyl	Durukhshan Agricultural Social Association	China
Pujin	400 ml	Fenoxaprop-p-ethyl	Target	Pakistan
Gramoxone	1500-2000 PR/litre	1,1 Dimethyl -1-4,4 bipyridinium dichloride	Syngenta	China
Diclofop methyl	1200 PR/litre	2,4 Dichlorophenoxy penoxy propionic acid	Agroxir	China
U 46 Combi Fluid 6	800-1000 PR/litre	2,4 Dichlorophenoxy penoxy propionic acid	Sahrai	China

4.6 Opium levels in 2012-13

Opium poppy dominates the landscape in the area north of the Boghra Canal and has intensified since 2008 as more land has come under cultivation and been allocated to poppy. Following a dramatic rise in opium prices in 2010—from 13,000 PR per *man* in the 2009-10 planting season to 70,000-80,000 PR per *man* 12 months later—many households moved to the monocropping of opium, abandoning wheat altogether. In the 2012-13 growing season, this began to reverse; there were signs of less monocropping than in the 2011-12 growing season,¹³³ particularly among those farmers cultivating plots of more than ten *jeribs*. Among farmers with larger landholdings, the low yields experienced in 2012 and concerns that their opium crop might be damaged again led many of them to return to a farming system with a level of wheat that met household food requirements.

Monocropping continued, however, among those with landholdings of less than ten *jeribs* as well as those who were either sharecropping or leasing land. There were even signs of tenant farmers and sharecroppers increasing the overall amount of land they farmed, and in doing so the amount of land allocated to opium poppy, in order to make up for the losses they experienced in the 2011-12 growing season. All the migrants who had settled in the area in the 2012-13 growing season (n7) had monocropped opium poppy.

At the time of harvest in May 2013, the farmers were concerned with the particularly low opium yields that many were experiencing, which was all the more challenging on top of the lower than average yields during the harvest of 2012. While in 2012 the farmers reported low yields ranging

133 Among the 86 respondents interviewed in the Dasht in November 2012, only 54 claimed to be monocropping opium poppy in the 2012-13 growing season, whereas 76 had reported that they had only cultivated opium poppy in the 2011-12 growing season. Of the 105 respondents interviewed in May 2013, only 60 had monocropped opium in the 2012-13 growing season as compared with 86 who had monocropped in the 2011-12 growing season.

from only one to two *man* per *jerib* of fresh opium,¹³⁴ by May 2013, yields were as low as “half a *man*” per *jerib* or, in some cases “three *charaks*”¹³⁵ per *jerib* and rarely as much as one *man* per *jerib*.¹³⁶ Most referred to the cause of these low yields as “disease” (*maraz*) and universally attributed it to “spraying (*daw-i-pashli dah*) of medicine.” Almost all of them placed the blame on US military forces, although a small number (n2) did suggest it was the British (*Angreze*). They expressed considerable anger towards those they felt were responsible.¹³⁷

Some of those interviewed said that their opium poppy had been sprayed and was suffering from a disease that burned the crop (*owre wa khest*). In support of these claims of crop destruction, some referred to a white powder that they found on the land and on their crops; others to “grain” that they believed to be contaminated seed.¹³⁸ It was said that these signs of spraying would be found in the morning and would often be linked to the sound of airplanes heard during the night—a relatively common phenomenon in the area, given the presence of Camps Bastion and Leatherneck immediately to the north. None of the respondents considered how repeated monocropping—on the same unit of land over what in many cases appeared to be three years—might affect yields of opium poppy.¹³⁹

Although the farmers offered varying versions of the method of dissemination of the disease, in terms of what form “spraying” took, there was broad consensus with regard to when and how the disease took effect. Reports from farmers and key respondents during the harvest of 2013 were consistent with reports from the same period in 2012 and with reports of similar outbreaks of disease witnessed in other provinces, including in Ghor in 2007 and 2008.¹⁴⁰ The first signs of the disease were typically described as the drying and yellowing of the leaves at the root of the plant. The earliest this occurred was at the hook stage of the plant’s development, but it often was found during capsule formation. The disease was then said to work up the plant, drying the capsule during the harvest stage, resulting in the low yields reported.

The economic impact of low yields was significant, particularly when compared with the reports of economic prosperity in 2010 and 2011. As in Nangarhar and other opium-producing provinces, the immediate response to a loss of opium was to reduce the quality and quantity of food consumed, decreasing the family intake of meat and fruit. Many expressed problems with being able to purchase meat only once a month; others referred to eating meat only at social functions or when

134 One man of fresh opium can lose significant weight depending on the moisture content, reducing by anything from ten to 40 per cent before it becomes fully dried. Opium is typically dried on a metal tray over a fire, although in the Dasht it can be placed on plastic or cloth and dried in the open under the sun. The opium is then placed on a board and “massaged” to remove any pockets of air or residual moisture. Finally it is stored in cloth bags of five or ten kilogrammes.

135 Four *charaks* equal one *man*; one *charak* equals of 1.125 kg, or 40 *khord*, making one *khord* the equivalent of 112.5 grams.

136 Some respondents did not state their yield. One simply said “They f***ed my mother,” Dasht Ab Pashak #11, May 2013. Another responded, “This year the mother of opium is f***ed by the government. It is gone,” Shurawak #10, May 2013.

137 “F*** the mother of these *kafir*; they came here and destroyed our lives,” Dasht Ab Pashak #2, May 2013. “The Americans spray the crop and we lost everything. Allah will move them from this area,” Shen Ghazai #4, May 2013. “This year we lost our crop. The disease f***ed my mother. It is because of these red *dowus* (foreigners),” Shen Ghazai #4, May 2013. “The poppy was destroyed by the Americans. I f*** their mother and wife by donkey. They destroyed my life,” Dashte Loy Manda #6, May 2013. “If the *dowus kafir* did not spray our crop we would have a good yield and good life but now we have nothing,” Shna Jama #6, May 2013. “The foreigners spray the medicine and destroy the home of the people. Allah will destroy the homes of these foreigners,” Dashte Koshal Kalay #4.

138 A further method of dissemination reported in the canal command area was in the irrigation system. The presence of opium poppy plants in fields of wheat where no poppy had been planted for a couple of years was cited as evidence of contaminated seed having been distributed by air by foreign forces. The germination of seed planted a few years earlier, following the ploughing of the land or from “volunteer” seeds scattered on the wind, is not uncommon and has been seen in other parts of the country including in Surkhrud two years after the crop was banned and had not been grown in the area.

139 Key respondents reported that most farmers in the *Dasht* and the canal command area of Helmand argue that if the land is left fallow in the summer, opium poppy can be grown repeatedly on the same land each winter for a several consecutive years over an extended period. Research in other countries, including the licit opium crop in India, suggests that the crop is vulnerable to disease if grown on the same land and that “. . . crop rotation and sowing healthy seeds can be an effective preventive method against diseases like Downey Mildew.” Jenö Bernath, “Poppy: The Genus *Papaver*,” (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 1998), 276.

140 David Mansfield, “Poppy Free Provinces: A Measure or a Target?” (Kabul: AREU 2007).

given charity.¹⁴¹ With the price of lamb as high as 2,400 PR per *man* (the equivalent of US\$5.33 per kilogramme), the challenges of purchasing meat on such low incomes were apparent. There were reports of households with livestock that sold some of the few animals that they had,¹⁴² further reducing the amount of meat they could have dried (*landi*) for consumption during the winter.¹⁴³ There were also instances of households obtaining loans with which to meet their daily expenses.¹⁴⁴

Gone were the references to purchasing motorbikes, tractors and cars, as well as the reports of having resources to finance the weddings of sons and brothers, as was common in 2011.¹⁴⁵ Those who owned land talked of earning barely enough from the sale of the crop to meet the costs of production; they claimed that they had “spent money but didn’t receive anything.”¹⁴⁶ Tenant farmers claimed that they would be lucky to reclaim the costs of production; there were reports that some of those who had leased land were renegotiating the terms of their leases and had asked the local Taliban commanders to mediate.¹⁴⁷ Table 5, detailing the net returns on opium cultivation north of the Boghra, supports such claims.

Sharecroppers reported significant hardships due to their reliance on opium production and their tendency to monocrop opium poppy. Although those who received only one-quarter of the final crop had not incurred the high costs of production and subsequent losses that others had, their income had still dropped to a level that was not sufficient to meet their basic needs. For instance, a household that conformed with the profile of an average sharecropping family within this sample would have 9.6 members and would have cultivated 12.4 *jeribs* of land and (see Table 5). Even if all of this land were opium poppy in 2013, they would have earned a net income of US\$223.66 per *jerib* and a total net income of US\$ 2,773.38, the equivalent of US\$0.79 net income per person per day—only enough to purchase 226 grams of wheat for each family member each day.¹⁴⁸ This is “significantly lower than the recommended 400 grams per person per day for relief food aid operations,” as noted by the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment.¹⁴⁹ This discrepancy highlights the degree of food insecurity even among those who cultivated opium poppy.

In fact, such was the plight of those cultivating opium poppy on former desert land owned by others that in May 2013, 90 percent of those sharecropping land¹⁵⁰ talked of leaving the area. A minority of these said that they would relocate back to the canal command area; most

141 “I was motivated to come to the *Dasht* by a relative. This was my mistake to come here. My relative did me wrong. Since I came to the *Dasht* it is like I ate shit, it feels like I will never eat again. Now I want to go back to my village,” Shen Ghazai #8, May 2013. “In the past during the *nesht* we had meat every day; this year it was only twice,” Shen Ghazai #11, May 2013. “If we have enough dry bread [bread on its own without other food], that is good,” Dashte Ab Pashak #5, May 2013. “This year our food is worse. If we find *shomrey* (yogurt) with bread, that will be good,” Dashte Ab Pashak #10. “F*** the mother of Karzai. Next year I will go to look for other locations where there is no spray,” Dashte Loy Manda #7, May 2013. “Even in the *nesht* [harvest] we don’t have meat. How is it possible to buy it any other time?” Dashte Loy Manda #8. “F*** the mother of Karzai. Next year I will go to look for another locations where there is no spray,” Dashte Loy Manda #11, May 2013. “The last several years my life was fine and my food was good but now my food is much worse,” Shna Jama #5, May 2013. “My food is f***ed. I have nothing to eat. In the past we had very good food but now, we have nothing,” Shurwak 3, May 2013. “I only eat meat at a wedding party or when I am given charity, I have no money to buy it,” Nawabad Shawal #5, May 2013. “We will eat soil because we have lost everything,” Dashte Shin Kalay #1, May 2013. “I am very poor, I am not able to buy a can of cooking oil,” Dashte Khoshal Kalay #8, May 2013.

142 Dashte Loy Manda #6, May 2013; Dashte Loy Manda #11, May 2013; Shen Ghazai#8; May 2013; Dasht Ab Pashak #9, May 2013; Dasht Ab Pashak #1, May 2013, Shurawak #2, May 2013, Shna Jama #1, May 2013; Nawabad Shawal #10, May 2013; Dashte Koshal Kalay #2, May 2013; Dashte Koshal Kalay #8, May 2013.

143 Many households retain one or two sheep, or purchase them in the fall. They then slaughter these animals and dry their meat to consume during the winter.

144 “I am under the loan [of 100,000 PR]; I am like a beggar. How is it possible to have food for my family?” Shen Ghazai #13, May 2013.

145 Mansfield, “Between a Rock and a Hard Place.”

146 Shurawak #6, May 2013.

147 This was reportedly occurring on a case-by-case basis; the Taliban had not offered any ruling on tenancy arrangements in the desert area. (Dashte Shin Kalay #8, May 2013)

148 This is based on a wheat price in the fall of 2013 of 180 PR per *man*, with an exchange rate of 110 PR per US\$: the equivalent of \$0.37 per kilogramme. With an average household consisting of 9.6 members, US\$0.79 would purchase 2.18 kilogrammes of wheat.

149 Central Statistics Office, National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, 57

150 Forty-four of the 49 sharecroppers in a sample of 105 interviews conducted in May 2013.

Table 5: Net returns on opium poppy cultivation on one jerib of land irrigated by diesel power tubewell

A: Capital	Amount	Units	Cost (PR)	Total (PR)	Afs	US\$	NOTES
Sink well	70	Metres	550	38500	21945	385	Wells typically dug 65 to 90 metres; 70 metres median response
Water Pump	1	Unit	80000	80000	45600	800	Needs replacing every 2-3 years
Generator	1	Unit	50000	50000	28500	500	Needs replacing every 2-3 years
Pipes	1	3-5"	55000	55000	31350	550	Needs replacing every 2-3 years
House	1	Unit	100,000	100000	57000	1000	It is part of the arrangement that landowner provides house and well
A: Total Start up Costs			285550	323500	184395	3235	
B: Inputs	Amount	Units	Cost (PR)	Total (PR)	Afs	US\$	
Seed	4	Kg	111	444	253.08	4.44	Quality seed ranges from 500-750 PR/man
Farmpower	2	Hrs	2500	5000	2850	50	Plough land for poppy three times.
Manure	1	Trailer	35000	35000	19950	350	Manure applied in former desert land north of the Boghra due to fertility problems
Herbicide	0.5	litre per jerib	1000	500	285	5	If use herbicide don't need to hire labour for weeding
Diesel	80	litre per jerib	110	8800	5016	88	Typically 80-120 litres per jerib: first irrigation at planting then every 3-4 days from spring until flowering
Fertiliser (DAP)	2	B a g (5 0 kg)	4800	9600	5472	96	DAP 50 Kg at planting and 50 kg during weeding
Fertiliser (Urea)	2	B a g (5 0 kg)	2200	4400	2508	44	Urea 50 Kg during weeding and 50 kg at flowering
Hired Labour	0.25	opium yield	52500	13125	7481.25	131.25	one sharecropper per 0.5 jerib, weeding by family when use herbicide
Food for labourers	28	person days	250	7000	3990	70	3 good meals per day
B (i) Sub total: Ag inputs (hired labour)				83869	47805.3	838.69	
B: (ii) Sub total: Ag inputs (family labour)				63744	36334.08	637.4	

C: Capital depletion							
Water Pump	0.5		80000	40000	22800	400	Well irrigates up to 20 jeribs
Generator	0.5		50000	25000	14250	250	Well irrigates up to 20 jeribs
Pipes	0.5		55000	27500	15675	275	Well irrigates up to 20 jeribs
Total costs			92500	52725		925	
Per jerib			4625	2636.25		46.25	Well irrigates up to 20 jeribs
D: Outputs							
Opium	0.75	Man	70000	52500	29925	525	Yields as reported in Helmand May 2013 and December 2013
Straw	365	Days	100	36500	20805	365	Straw provides cooking fuel for household and for baking of bread. Both land owner and sharecropper take what they need.
Seed	7	Seer	66	462	263.34	4.62	Increasingly not collected and sold; only take what is needed by household
Sub total: Gross returns				89462	50993.34	894.62	
E: Post harvest payments to institutions							
Mullah	5%		52500	2625	1496.25	26.25	5% paid to mullah in Dasht land typically paid by landowner or 4/5 sharecropper
Taliban	0.0	Per jerib	70000	1750	997.5	17.5	"Tax" of 1 khord per jerib in 2013 due to low yield
Subtotal: post harvest payments				4375	2493.75	43.75	
NET RETURNS: NO HIRED LABOUR							
Net returns to owner cultivator - Family Labour				16718	9529.26	167.18	Does not employ any labour at any stage, uses only family labour
NET RETURNS: HIRED LABOUR							
Net returns to owner cultivator - hired labour during harvest				-3407	-1941.99	-34.07	Does not employ any sharecroppers only hired labour during harvest
Net returns to Sharecropper (1/4) and no costs				22365.5	12748.34	223.66	Landowner pays all the costs
Net returns to Landowner (3/4) and pays all costs				-25056.8	-14282.4	-250.57	Landowner pays all the costs

Net returns to Sharecropper (5/6) all costs	-13722.2	-7821.63	-137.22	Sharecropper pays all costs except capital costs
Net returns to Landowner (1/6) no costs except capital	10583.54	6032.62	105.84	Sharecropper pays all costs except capital costs
Net returns to Sharecropper (6/7) all costs	-11306.7	-6444.81	-113.07	Sharecropper pays all costs except capital costs
Net returns to Landowner (1/7) no costs except capital	7899.68	4502.82	78.10	Sharecropper pays all costs except capital costs

said they would look for another area in Helmand where they might be able to grow poppy, such as Nahre Seraj, Nowzad, Sangin and Washir, as well as Bakwa, Pusht Rud and Khash Rud in Farah.¹⁵¹ Many had resigned themselves to the fact that, without a return to opium poppy in the canal command area, it would be hard to find land south of the Nahre Boghra; they would have to remain in the desert or move onto Bakwa where yields had not fallen so significantly in 2013 and where farmers still talked of obtaining two *man* per *jerib*.¹⁵² Some of those interviewed had already begun to look for land, but only one had already found land on which he could grow poppy in Nahre Seraj.¹⁵³ Fieldwork in December 2013 revealed there was still no shortage of farmers sharecropping in the area north of the Boghra Canal; indeed new farmers were still arriving for the 2013-14 growing season hoping that yields would be better.

The most resolute in the face of diminishing opium yields were those who owned land; they showed no sign of leaving. They had built their homes in the desert, had acquired capital during the good years,¹⁵⁴ and had nowhere to go. As one respondent exclaimed, in frustration at how limited his options were, “Where is the village of my mother?”¹⁵⁵ While some landowners could use savings from previous years of cultivation to compensate for the low yields in 2012 and 2013, none could afford to subsist on the income that they earned from the 2013 opium crop.

Some of those who were less vulnerable had land in the canal area (n4), and while they experienced a significant shortfall in cash income, they at least had a relatively secure source of staples such as wheat and maize.¹⁵⁶ For example, one respondent had leased 15 *jeribs* of land for 1000 *man* of wheat.¹⁵⁷ As a tenant, he was responsible for paying all the costs of production. However, with a yield of only three *charaks* of opium per *jerib* (the equivalent of 3.375 kilogrammes), he would have earned a net return of only US\$167 per *jerib* if he did not use any hired labour (see Table 5). The rental costs per *jerib* were 66.7 *man* of wheat, the cash equivalent of 11,866 PR, or US\$119.26, allowing him to just about break even. As this respondent stated, “My life is not bad, as we have land in the lower part [in Ab Pashak] and we have some food.”

Yet this farmer, like others who had come to the *Dasht* for the 2012-3 growing season, had sold much of his livestock in the fall of 2012 before leaving the canal command area, arguing that it was difficult to maintain a large number of animals in the area due to the cost of fodder and that he needed the money to pay for agricultural inputs. His ten *jeribs* of land in the canal had been cultivated with wheat in the winter and primarily maize during the summer,¹⁵⁸ only producing food for consumption and a total gross cash income of 210,800PR¹⁵⁹ or US\$2,118 for a family of 12: the equivalent of US\$0.48 per person per day.¹⁶⁰ With his staple food needs met by household production, this cash income would be enough to provide his family with one kilogramme of lamb every five days if they spent no money on agricultural inputs and did not require any medical attention.

151 “Three years ago I came to the Dasht. I was invited by my relative. Because of insecurity I left Washir and came here but you will not see any more of me in the Dasht. Even if I risk being killed with my family, I will go back to Washir,” Shen Ghazai #9, May 2013. “Now I pack my things together and move from this area,” Shen, Ghazai#4, May 2013). “F*** the mother of Karzai. Next year I will go to some other locations where there is no spray,” Dashte Loy Manda #6, May 2013. “If I find land in the canal area where i can grow poppy I will go back, otherwise I will stay here,” Shna Jama #6, May 2013. “If I got this information that poppy was sprayed in the Dasht I would not have come. Even if the landowner pays me money I will not stay here this year,” Shna Jama #7, May 2013). “If I find land somewhere else I will go there to grow good poppy,” Dashte Shin Kalay #4, May 2013.

152 Fieldwork at 12 research sites in Bakwa confirmed that opium yields had fallen but were not as low as those at Helmand, and that there was a steady inflow of migrants from Helmand.

153 Dashte Ab Pashak #8, May 2013.

154 “I came here ten years ago. At that time I lived in a tent, now I have my own house,” Dashte Koshal Kalay #1, May 2013.

155 Dashte Loy Manda #7, May 2013

156 “We have meat once or twice a week; our life is okay as we have land in Nad e Ali,” Shna Jama #8, May 2013.

157 Dashte Ab Pashak #12, May 2013.

158 The summer crop was seven *jeribs* of maize, one *jerib* of melon, one *jerib* of watermelon and one *jerib* of alfalfa. He said that these ten *jeribs* were for household consumption and for the livestock that he retained in the canal command area.

159 This is based on selling 600 *man* of wheat for 178 PR per *man* and 1000 *man* of maize at 102 PR per *man*.

160 This respondent commented, “I don't know if these *dowus* come to fight the Taliban or destroy the poppy,” Dasht Ab Pashak #12, May 2013

Another respondent rented 20 *jeribs* of land in Loy Bagh in Nad e Ali,¹⁶¹ which were worked by his brother, and sharecropped 12 *jeribs* of land in Shurawak. His rent in the canal command area was a total of 1500 *man* of wheat for the year, or 75 *man* per *jerib*. He cultivated all 20 *jeribs* of land with wheat in the winter and in the summer cultivated 15 *jeribs* of maize and five *jeribs* of mung bean. The wheat yield was 160 *man* per *jerib*, giving the respondent a total of 3200 *man*. He paid the rent of 1500 *man* and sold a further 1000 *man* for 160 PR per *man*, generating a gross income of 160,000 PR. The rest of the wheat was consumed by his family.¹⁶² The 15 *jeribs* of maize produced 2,700 *man*; he sold 2,500 *man* for 105 PR, receiving a gross income of 262,500 PR and keeping the rest for his household and his livestock. The mung bean had a yield of 40 *man* per *jerib*; he sold all 200 *man* for only 270 PR, as disease had damaged the crop. This added another 54,000 PR to his income. In total, the 20 *jeribs* of land he rented in Loy Bagh generated a gross income of 476,500 PR after rent (the equivalent of US\$4,788 or 108.79 PR per person per day) and provided his family of 12 with their basic staples.

From the 12 *jeribs* of land in the former desert that he sharecropped in 2013 for one-quarter of the crop, he earned a further US\$2,683.92, the equivalent of US\$0.61 per person per day. He summed up his situation with provoking the comment, “I am not lucky. When I buy a male donkey, the price of the female donkey goes up. When I buy a female donkey, the price of a male donkey goes up.”

These examples, confirmed by data on the net returns on opium poppy under different land tenure arrangements, highlight just how challenging the economic situation was for many households in the area north of the Boghra canal in 2013. Low yields for a second consecutive year had a significant economic impact on the population, particularly the land-poor and those who had not acquired the capital and assets to support themselves and their families in the run up to the next opium harvest in the Spring of 2014.

4.7 Conclusion: Helmand

In the late 1990s, the area south of Highway 1 and north of the Boghra Canal was largely desert. Even in 2002, at the beginning of the Karzai administration, the area had only 891 hectares of land under cultivation and contained only a few migrants who had taken up settlement to escape the drought in the mid- to late 1990s. By 2012, 35,505 hectares of land were under cultivation in this area, with an estimated population of 160,000. Over that same period, the area had gone through further transformations in the composition of the population, agricultural practices and the acquisition of capital and assets.

In 2002, the initial migrants in the former desert area were joined by powerful politico-military actors from south of the canal who took large tracts of land that they subsequently gifted and sold over a number of years, transforming the economic and physical landscape of the area. Land was parcelled up, commoditised and improved. Land prices increased as a growing number of migrants arrived in the area looking to purchase land, often for the first time, and to settle permanently. Despite the hardships of moving into the desert area—its dry terrain and the absence of health services and accessible markets—farmers kept coming, drawn by the opportunity to buy land at an affordable price.

In 2008, following the implementation of the Helmand Food Zone—a concerted effort by then Governor Mangal to eliminate opium poppy cultivation from the canal command area—a growing number of migrants arrived to work the land of others as sharecroppers and tenant farmers. Between 2008 and 2013, the area under cultivation north of the Boghra Canal more than doubled as more land-poor farmers and their families settled in the area, unable to find land in the canal command area as opium poppy was steadily replaced by less labour-intensive licit crops.

For the arriving to work the land of others, the land tenure arrangements in the desert were different from those south of in the canal, and many looked to maximise their returns by monocropping opium so that they too might be able to purchase a piece of land at less than one-

161 Shurawak #6, May 2013.

162 The family consumed one *man* and one *charak* of wheat per day (1.25 *man*) and a total of 456.25 *man* per year.

tenth of the price of the better irrigated areas in the canal command area. Good plant husbandry—crop rotation and leaving land fallow—became increasingly untenable as more farmers shifted to a cropping system that was entirely devoted to opium.

Farmers began to adapt to new practices and technologies, as they had done during the initial years of settlement when they began to use deep well technology. Sharecropping and tenant farming allowed landowners to better manage the labour costs of an agricultural system dedicated to such a labour-intensive crop, and to bring more land under agricultural production. The introduction of herbicides and experimentation with new products that were more appropriate to opium poppy further supported the reduction of labour inputs during the weeding season in the spring.

The growth in both the population and the economy in the desert areas was accompanied by the expansion in the size of the bazaars that straddled the Nahre Boghra in Nawabad Shawal and Loy Manda, as well as by an increase in temporary, weekly markets in the desert itself. The economy in the canal command area also benefitted from the demand for the rent of drilling rigs and the purchase of diesel fuel, herbicides, solar panels, motorbikes, fertiliser and basic commodities. With the absence of opium poppy in the canal command area, the growth in opium production in the former desert not only offered land and a residence for the land-poor but wage labour opportunities during the harvest season. Indeed, the demand for labour in the desert during the harvest was so great that wage labour rates in Gereshk and Lashkar Gah would double.

The political landscape of the desert terrain has also changed over the last decade. The patronage of the rural elite linked to the former Governor Sher Mohammed Akhunzade and the Karzai administration that shaped the settlement in the early part of the 21st century has been diluted by the commoditisation of land and the influx of new migrants into the area. Kinship and amity mold the rural communities that have formed north of the Boghra Canal. Without direct links to the people who reside in the former desert area and affiliation with a tribe that is considered indigenous to Helmand, there are few opportunities to find land and settle.

A further element that now dominates the political landscape in this area is the enmity to the Afghan Government and the foreign military forces that are seen to support it. As opposed to the original settlers, who took land at the behest of a politico-military elite that owed some allegiance to the provincial and central administration, this is now a population that increasingly identifies itself as suffering from the egregious behaviour of the central government. Since 2008, many migrants see themselves as economic victims forced to leave the canal command area due to the government's counternarcotics effort. The forays north of the Boghra Canal by the ALP, ANSF and foreign military forces since 2012 have only intensified the hostility to the Afghan Government, as have diminishing opium yields and the belief that the opium crop has been "sprayed." Under these conditions it is hard to differentiate between the rural population and AGEs; they are intrinsically entwined. The Taliban reside in the area with the full support of the population; they are seen as a source of mediation in local disputes and as protectors of the opium crop—the mainstay of the local economy—from the government's counternarcotics efforts.

Given the critical role that opium poppy has played in the physical, social, economic and political transformation of this former desert area, it is hard to see how a central or provincial government committed to eliminating opium poppy will prevail here. The only apparent possibility for opium and the population to leave the area is that either environmental or market forces render production unviable. But even here the prospects are not good. While the proliferation of tubewells may have caused the falling water table, the wells appear to have been sunk to such a depth that it will be a long time before the area returns to desert, if at all.

Some hope that increased production will lead to a fall in the price of opium, making cultivation commercially unviable under the high-cost production techniques that are found in this former desert area. There may be some potential to this argument, but it is important to keep in mind that the returns on opium differ considerably by economic group and land tenure systems. As this research has shown, some households can still make a profit on opium even when others do not. Those with land and capital might cultivate on a smaller scale, leaving some land fallow, refraining from monocropping and waiting for the prices to rise once the supply falls. Moreover,

as we have seen with the introduction of herbicides and experimentation with solar-powered tubewells in Spin Boldak and Bakwa, farmers have the capacity to adapt and find ways to reduce their production costs.¹⁶³

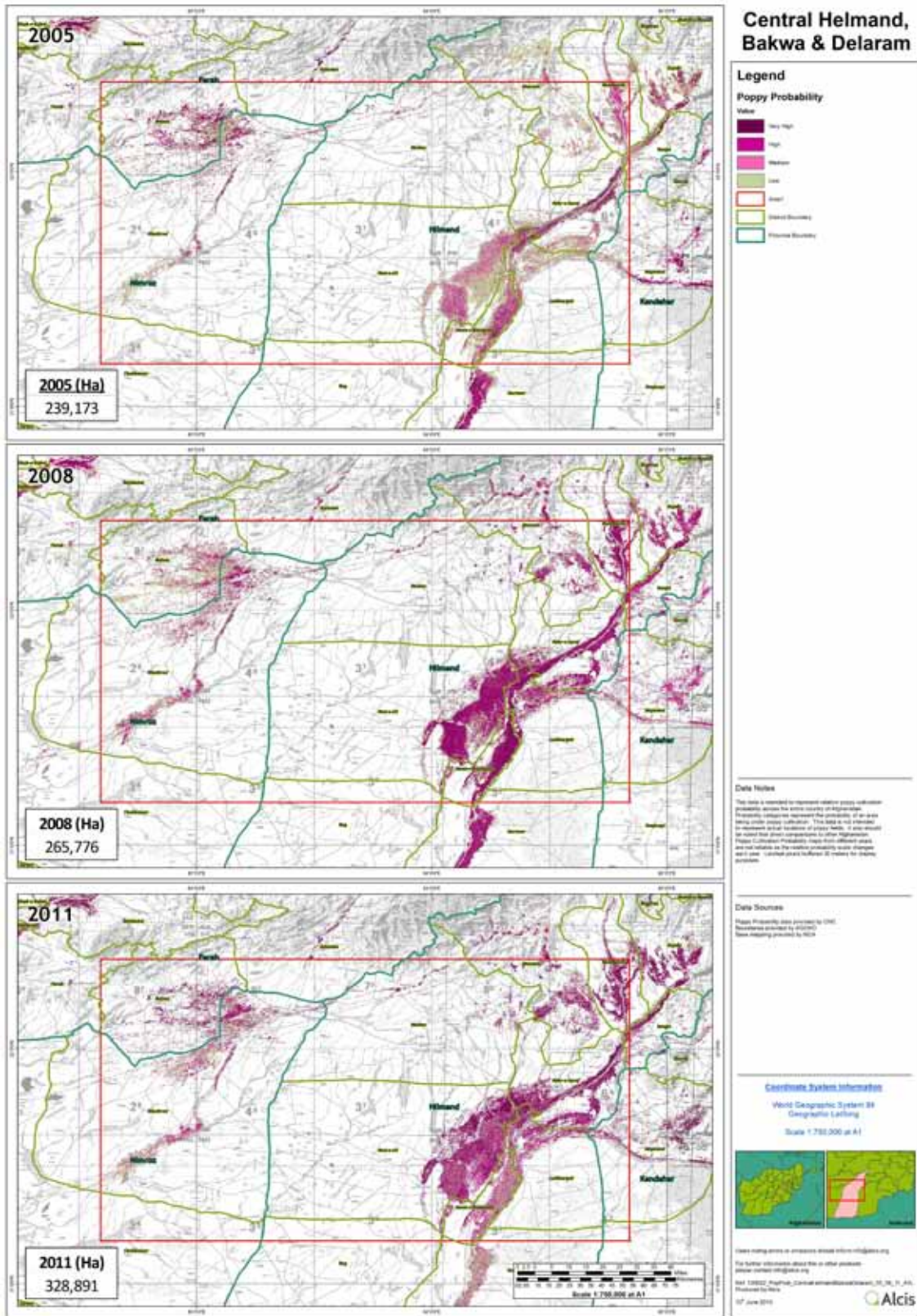
Just as a fall in price might lead to farmers abandoning opium production in this area, there is another possibility: that the fall in yields—and thereby in returns—during the last three years out of four (and particularly in 2013) will persuade farmers to stop cultivating opium poppy.

In case yields continue at their present low level, what is this population of 160,000 people to do? While it has been assumed that they are migratory and can return to the places they came from, this is clearly not the case. Most of those who own land have now settled permanently in this area and have nowhere else to go. Similarly, those who moved to the area to lease or sharecrop the land of others cannot return to the canal command area where there is currently little need for their labour. While many might stay, unable to find land elsewhere and grateful for a house to live in, those who do leave will simply go to another desert area looking for land where they can grow opium poppy and where yields have not fallen as much; the problem will simply move elsewhere.

And the *Dasht* north of the Boghra Canal is only one of such former desert spaces to be found in southern Afghanistan where these processes of transformation are at work. There are other parts of Helmand north of Highway 1 in Nahre Seraj and Nawzad where there has been a significant increase in the amount of land in agriculture over the last decade (see Figure 18). There are also areas in Bakwa, Bala Bulok and Gulistan in Farah; in Khash Rod and Delarem in Nimroz and in Zahre and Spin Boldak in Kandahar. This is a population about which little is known; it is not covered by official statistics, formal surveys or even, it would seem, the government's maps of recognised settlements. While some might hope this is simply a peripheral problem—a small population engaged in illicit activities—all the evidence suggests that it is a growing population that maintains strong tribal, familial and commercial ties to those in more agriculturally productive areas but that feels excluded by the Afghan state.

163 Fieldwork in Bakwa and Spin Boldak, as well as with those selling solar power technology in the bazaars of Delarem, Farah and Kandahar, revealed that some farmers are using solar power to run their tubewells. Currently this remains expensive for many farmers with a start-up cost of around US\$12,000. For more details see Mansfield and Fishstein, "Eyes Wide Shut."

Figure 18: the expansion in agricultural land in central Helmand, Bakwa and Delarem, 2005-2011



5. Conclusion

It is almost a truism to say that opium poppy is concentrated in chronically insecure areas of Afghanistan where the insurgency is at its strongest. Indeed, this is a common refrain of both UNODC and the GIRoA.¹⁶⁴ But surely the real issue is not just to acknowledge that there is a relationship; rather it is to explore the nature of that relationship and the causal direction between opium poppy and insecurity.

Conventional wisdom has it that the primary relationship between opium poppy cultivation and AGEs is a financial one. The image is of a rural population encouraged, perhaps even coerced, to grow opium so that the Taliban can increase its revenue from rural taxes. We are presented with *ushr*: a taxation system where ten percent of the crop is collected by representatives of the Taliban across most of the southern provinces, as well as parts of the east.¹⁶⁵ In this scenario the Taliban provides protection of the crop against government forces looking to destroy it. The inference is that opium poppy cultivation causes insecurity because it funds the insurgency, at least in part.

Those who question the efficacy of efforts to reduce opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan also draw on the financial relationship between AGEs and opium poppy cultivation. They argue that the act of crop suppression itself increases violence, fuels support for the insurgency and even increases revenue for the Taliban by driving up the price of the opium crop. Opium poppy cultivation, efforts to eliminate it and conflict therefore go hand-in-hand.

There are elements of truth in this, but empirical work such as this research suggests a far more complex relationship between opium poppy cultivation and insecurity. For one, it is clear that the financial relationship at the farmgate level is not as intimate as argued and that rural “taxation” by AGEs is far less systematised than conventional wisdom would have us believe. AGEs are, after all, not an entity independent of the population. While some may be external actors who have come into a rural area from a neighbouring country or province, many are local: relatives of the farmers who are cultivating opium poppy or farmers themselves.

As this study has shown, in some areas such as the southern districts of Nangarhar, AGEs are not even a coherent or cohesive movement but a band of disparate groups and entities who vie for influence and employ highly localised systems of revenue collection. They are not the Inland Revenue of the government of the United Kingdom or the Internal Revenue Service of the United States who can enforce a system of revenue generation across entire provinces or regions. Nor are the rural population and their income streams subject to the same kind of scrutiny as most British or US citizens. Farmers will pay “what they can afford, draw on patronage networks to pay as little as possible and, like many in western countries, find ways to conceal their true “earnings”—a task that is easier for those who consume much of what they produce than for those who receive a wage slip or paycheck.

Often being from the local population and relying on local support for logistics, AGEs may also wish to be responsive to the economic predicament of rural communities. In particular, they need to be careful not to compete with existing rural institutions whose support they rely on. For example, looking to subsume the local *mullah's* payments on the final crop would not be a wise decision if AGEs were also relying on clerics to advocate for them at Friday prayer, to act as a focal point for the collection of animal hides at Eid, or to solicit irregular cash contributions from the local community. If AGEs were exacting a similar or higher payment from the local population as local clerics get paid for their services to the community—whether as a percentage of the crop or as a wage, as is the case in Achin and Khogiani—it may impose too high a financial burden on the local farmers whom they are looking to court. The move to reduce the already limited payments from farmers to AGE in the area north of the Boghra Canal in 2013, following a year of particularly low yields, suggests an insurgent movement that wishes to be seen to be reacting to the priorities of those it lives among.

¹⁶⁴ UNODC/MCN, Afghanistan Opium Poppy Survey 2013, 8.

¹⁶⁵ “Afghanistan’s Narco War: Breaking the Link Between Drug Traffickers and Insurgents,” (Washington, DC: A Report the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, US Government Printing Office, 2009), 10; “Addiction, Crime and Insurgency: The transnational threat of Afghan opium,” (Vienna, UNODC, 2009), 2.

There is also the obvious methodological challenge associated with the data that we have been presented with to support the argument that one-tenth of the crop is appropriated by the Taliban. According to Christine Noelle, 1997, *ushr* has historically been used as a generic term for “tax” in Afghanistan.¹⁶⁶ It is therefore necessary to distinguish between the different payments made to different institutions, in different locations, as well as how much is paid and on what basis. Is it in cash or in kind? Is it a percentage of the final crop or a fixed amount per household or per unit of land? Is there no specific “rule,” with the result that payments are sought on the basis of what a farmer can afford or as charity and help at the end of each agricultural season? Or, as in the case in many areas in rural Afghanistan, are there elements of all of these payments at work? To simply ask a farmer if he pays *ushr* to the Taliban and, if the answer is “yes,” to assume that he pays ten percent of his final crop would be a gross error.¹⁶⁷ This is not to deny that AGEs generate revenues from opium production—or indeed from the trade—but it is to say that their interests in cultivation may lie less in the financial returns and more in soliciting the support of the rural population.

This links to the second problem with the image of the symbiotic relationship between opium poppy cultivation and insecurity, the question of whose insecurity are we referring to and what form it actually take. When UNODC refer to insecurity and draw on the classification of the United Nations Department of Safety and Security,¹⁶⁸ they are primarily referring to physical insecurity and areas with limited or no access to United Nations agencies and NGOs. They are not referring to the economic security of the population or necessarily to the levels of violence that the rural population is subject to.

It has become increasingly apparent that some communities will abandon opium poppy cultivation with little resistance and without resorting to violent rebellion; they may even experience improvements in their welfare, gain better access to health and education, diversify their income base and cultivate a mix of crops that can generate higher net returns than opium poppy over the year. But it is equally apparent that other rural communities are not in this privileged position.

Those significantly disadvantaged by an effective ban on opium may be geographically concentrated in areas with limited resource endowments, such as the southern districts of Nangarhar. Or they may have limited access to land and resources because of their particular land tenure arrangements, as has been the case amongst sharecroppers in central Helmand. In both these cases the rural population has experienced economic insecurity due to a ban on opium production; a ban that they believe has been imposed because the government and international forces have had the coercive power—or the appearance of having that power—with which to come to areas of cultivation unhindered.

When these farmers have returned to poppy cultivation, it is often not a case of AGEs imposing themselves and encouraging or coercing a population to grow opium. Rather the farmers perceive it as an act driven by the need for economic security, and if they have to engage in acts of violence directly or look to the support of others to repel government forces from the area, then so be it. In these cases, it is the ban on opium poppy cultivation in the absence of viable alternatives that has ultimately led to insecurity and not opium poppy cultivation per se.

For example, in Achin, in the southern districts of Nangarhar, a population that was initially broadly supportive of GIRoA and its state-building effort subsequently rejected the rural elite and returned to opium production after a poorly handled land dispute and the cumulative effect of opium ban. Small landholdings, high population densities and limited non-farm income-earning opportunities all militated towards the population cultivating crops that generated relatively high returns per unit of irrigated land.

166 Christine Noelle, “State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan: The Reign of Amir Dost Muhammed Khan (1826-1863),” (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 1997)

167 David Mansfield, “Taxation in Central Helmand and Kandahar,” (Kabul: unpublished Briefing Paper 7 for the FCO, March 2013)

168 UNODC/MCN Opium Poppy Survey (Kabul: April 2013), 47.

Since taking up arms and rejecting the presence of the state's security forces, the rural population's engagement with the Afghan state is more in their favour; it is one where education and health services are still operational and many households still have members who work as employees of GIROA, even in the ANSF. The balance of coercive power has, however, shifted back toward the population with the growing presence of armed AGEs in the area. Indeed, developments in both Achin and Khogiani in 2013 point to the political hybridity that can be found in many areas of opium poppy concentration in Nangarhar, where the population and a multitude of state and anti-state actors explore ways to co-exist.

In Helmand, the population has to some degree recognised the concentration of the means of violence in the hands of the Afghan state within the canal command area and not sought to engage directly in rural rebellion. Instead, those that who been most adversely affected by the attempts to ban opium poppy cultivation have relocated to the former desert area north of the Boghra and sought refuge in this arid area where they do not have even basic amenities. Most consider themselves displaced by the government and its policies.

In the case of those that used to sharecrop land in the canal command area there is a lot of truth to this claim. Once opium was progressively banned in the Helmand Food Zone and replaced with less labour-intensive crops, the land-poor were no longer required. It became much more difficult to find land or a house to reside in and if they did, they could not meet their basic needs with the income they earned on a smaller share of licit crops like wheat, maize and mung bean that were significantly less remunerative than opium poppy. Moreover, many of the alternatives offered by the state were appropriate only for those who owned land, and the mechanism for delivery—through the rural elite—made it difficult for the land-poor to obtain any benefits.

Given this scenario, what options did the land-poor really have but to draw on tribal and familial relationships and look for land elsewhere? With the proximity of the former desert land just north of the Boghra Canal, a process of settlement driven by a politico-military elite from within the canal, and strong links to the provincial administration already underway, it was inevitable that many would find themselves in the desert. Perceiving themselves as victims of government policy—both counternarcotics and development—and then being subjected to the ALP's forays across the Boghra Canal in the name of counterinsurgency or counternarcotics has only intensified this population's hostility to the government and strengthened support for the Taliban.

Ultimately, what we see in both the southern districts of Nangarhar and the desert space north of the Boghra Canal is a rural population that is far from passive. The farmers have adapted to and played a role in shaping the ecological, physical and economic terrain in which they reside by adopting new technologies as they have become available, including mobile phones, *zaranj* (a three-wheel scooter taxi), tubewells, herbicides, and solar panels. In the same way, the farmers have also adapted to and shaped the political environment. In some areas the rural population has relocated and settled in areas where the state has not concentrated the means of violence. In other areas they have, over time, taken up armed resistance themselves, and given support to AGEs in order to shift the balance of power away from the government and back to local centres of influence.

In this increasingly complex terrain, the rural population has sought arrangements that best suit their needs, drawing patronage, income and services from the government and the public sector where they can, while at the same time engaging with, supporting or even encouraging local AGEs to resist government efforts to subjugate and coerce the population. It is precisely this kind of political hybridity in which opium poppy cultivation can thrive in Afghanistan, unhampered and unregulated by either government or AGEs. The risk of further fragmentation and increased opium poppy cultivation after 2014 would seem exceptionally high.

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