

Responding to Risk and Uncertainty: Understanding the Nature of Change in the Rural Livelihoods of Opium Poppy Growing Households in the 2007/08 Growing Season



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Farmer's decisions over which crops to plant are complex and highly contextual. There is rarely a single determining factor that can explain changes in the amount of land allocated to a crop. A range of different socio-economic, political and environmental factors informs such decisions. The individual circumstances of the households—their resources, aspirations, traditions and values all inform the decisions they make. For many farmers in Afghanistan the options are limited, shaped by the social and economic structures that govern access to assets such as land, credit and labour.¹ Insecurity and corruption also limit market access and therefore choices. Any decision over which crops are cultivated and how much land they should occupy has consequences for the other activities that make up the household's livelihood

In rural Afghanistan households need to manage risk and uncertainty. As we have seen in the 2007/08 growing season, Afghanistan is a country of climatic extremes. A particularly cold winter that led to the death of an estimated 650 people and a loss of 190,000 livestock² has been followed by the failure of spring rains across much of the country. It is anticipated that the rainfed wheat crop located primarily in the northern and central regions will fare particularly badly but there will also be lower wheat yields in the irrigated areas in the rest of the country.³ All this is on top of the exponential rise in the retail price of wheat that the country has experienced since December 2007 as a consequence of the rise in global wheat prices and the Government of Pakistan's ban on commercial wheat exports to Afghanistan. So much so that the Government of Afghanistan now estimates that '*3.5 million people are seriously food insecure*' and need immediate assistance.⁴

The pre-existing levels of food insecurity, low nutritional status, high rates of morbidity and mortality, as well as weak social protection systems, compound the impact of these particular shocks. Conflicts over land, water and political power are still a fact of life for most rural communities. The wider political and military conflict both within Afghanistan, and increasingly across the border in Pakistan, has led to casualties, the displacement of people, and constrains on the movement of goods and services. Indeed in some parts of Afghanistan travel on the road incurs the risk of intimidation, violence and extortion from a range of both state and non-state actors. Both 'nuisance taxes' and the imposition of a 'security premium' by road haulers impacts on the competitiveness of goods and services transported over even a fairly short distance.

It is against this backdrop that rural households must consider how best to allocate their resources to maximise their welfare, whilst at the same time managing the risk

¹ Department for International Development/World Bank (2008). 'Afghanistan: Economic Incentives and Development Initiatives to Reduce Opium Production' by Chris Ward, David Mansfield, Peter Oldham and William Byrd. February 2008. Pages 9-11.

² Figures derived by the Afghanistan National Disasters Management Authority. See the United Nation's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Relief's Integrated Regional Information Networks 'AFGHANISTAN: Government raps emergency response commission as winter death toll rises'. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=76600>

³ USAID/ FEWS MET 2008. Afghanistan Food Security Update March 2008. page 2.

⁴ The United Nation's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Relief's Integrated Regional Information Networks 'AFGHANISTAN: 'Over 3.5 million "at high risk" of food insecurity' <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=78715>

and uncertainty that is so prevalent in rural Afghanistan. There are clearly trade offs that need to be made given the complex and diversified nature of rural livelihoods in Afghanistan. For Afghan farmers it is never simply an issue of focusing their entire effort on a single activity that theoretically might maximise their returns. In fact in the vast majority of cases maintaining what is considered a minimum level of food crop production is given priority and rarely is the total amount of cultivated land available solely allocated to cash crops. This is particularly the case when food prices are increasing as rapidly as they are in Afghanistan.

This Report explores the process of decision-making in rural households in Afghanistan. It is the sixth in the series of what has become known as the 'Drivers Report'. The Report is based on 475 in-depth interviews conducted in twenty-three different districts and across nine provinces in Afghanistan. It explores a cross section of households across Afghanistan and attempts to explain the circumstances, socio-economic, political and environmental, which drove them to cultivate opium poppy (or not) in the 2006/07 growing season. As in previous years the report looks at the range of assets that households have at their disposal, their perceptions of the different types of interventions they are subject to, the services that are delivered, and the ways in which the rule of law, particularly with regard to the eradication of the opium crop, is enforced. It also identifies the possible explanations for moving in and out of opium poppy cultivation this year.

The analysis contained within the Report is not intended to be exhaustive; it is limited by sample size, the prevailing security situation, and the increasingly sensitive nature of the subject matter. There is a need to exercise caution when attempting to extrapolate the findings of this work. That said, the report does provide valuable insights into the process of change in rural livelihoods in Afghanistan and gives voice to a population that is so often caricatured by both policy makers and the media in their debates on counter-narcotics policy in Afghanistan.

The Report identifies that there is a discernable shift towards wheat cultivation in the 2007/08 growing season. The causes of this shift are multiple and can partly be explained by some farmers abandoning opium poppy because of pressure from the authorities. However, there is also evidence of farmers increasing levels of wheat cultivation at the expense of lower levels of horticultural and fodder production because of the dramatic increase in the price of wheat and concerns over food security.

In some cases the preference for wheat cultivation is particularly pronounced. Nangarhar is the most obvious example with the crop being all but monocropped in some parts of the province. This shift is largely driven by the authorities' desire to deliver another dramatic reduction in levels of opium poppy cultivation. However, the expansion of wheat cultivation at the expense of vegetable production in those districts nearer the provincial centre of Jalalabad gives supporting evidence to those that argue that the consequences of the dramatic rise in wheat prices over the last twelve months is being felt in all parts of the country.

In other provinces such as Badakhshan, Baghlan, and Ghor, there is also evidence of land that was formerly cultivated with opium poppy being turned over to wheat this cropping season. Falling farmgate prices for opium, particularly low yields in some

places and the labour intensity of the crop all militate against opium poppy at time of escalating food prices. As such the efforts by the authorities to dissuade farmers from cultivating opium poppy are 'pushing on an open door' in some parts of the country.

Respondents in the south remained the only exception. At the time of planting, and despite efforts by the authorities to dissuade it, those interviewed in the south were largely looking at maintaining or marginally increasing levels of opium poppy cultivation. However, this projection took place in November/December 2007 as the price of wheat continued its upward trajectory in these provinces and prior to the end of the planting season. There is a real potential for farmers in the south to diverge from their projected levels of opium poppy cultivation and allocate some of the remaining land that they had initially planned for the opium poppy crop to wheat. Indeed anecdotal evidence collected later in the season suggests that some farmers had actually ploughed up some of their opium poppy in order to plant wheat

Any reductions in the level of opium poppy cultivation this year will of course be welcomed. The peak level of cultivation of 193,000 ha in the 2006/07 growing season caused considerable concern. However, the movement from one annual agricultural crop, particularly a food crop, to another raises questions over the sustainability of such a shift. The sustainability of the reductions in opium production in the province of Nangarhar, in particular, remains highly questionable.

Past experience in this province show how difficult it is to maintain low levels of cultivation in areas where extensive opium poppy has simply been replaced by wheat the following year. The high number of farmers in Nangarhar unable to meet their own wheat requirements despite extensive cultivation highlights the precarious position that many in the province will find themselves this season. In 2007/08 Afghan farmers find themselves compelled to purchase wheat and other food items at vastly inflated prices but with less cash income to do so due to their loss of income from opium poppy. The situation is made all the more difficult by lower precipitation, falling onion prices (a crop that had proven financially attractive over the last three years), as well as the wider deflationary impact of the opium poppy ban. There is the likelihood of increasing levels of violence in the province in response to both the deteriorating economic situation and in preparation for the 2008/09 opium poppy planting season

Those households with land in provinces such as Balkh and Badakhshan may be better able to manage a reduction in opium production than their counterparts in Nangarhar. Larger landholdings due to the amount of rainfed land available, has meant a greater proportion of households have the potential to meet their household food requirements through their own wheat production in those years of adequate winter and spring precipitation. However, with the failure of the spring rains in northern and central Afghanistan there are concerns over crop failure in the rainfed areas this season thus limiting farmer's ability to produce grain themselves. Previous research has shown how the expansion of opium poppy cultivation in the early 21st century in Badakhshan can in part be explained as a response to the drought in the late 1990s, the failure of the rainfed wheat crop and the subsequent sale of livestock.

The same balance between livestock, cereals and cash crops exists in Ghor. In fact last season many of those who had retained some of their herds and flocks during the

drought elected to abandon opium poppy and invest in livestock, cultivating more land with wheat and fodder crops. Only those who had lost most or all of their livestock during the drought years persisted with opium poppy - despite the fact that the crop had repeatedly failed for the last five to six years. They saw no alternative. With many in the central highlands having lost their livestock this season it is likely that some could return to opium production as a coping strategy.

In the southern provinces the Report suggests farmers are caught between Anti Government Elements (AGE) that are seen to be encouraging cultivation for political advantage and corrupt officials who are at best are seen as complicit in the trade and at worst as being directly involved. Not only has corruption and insecurity increased the transaction costs of doing business in the south but also the threat of being stopped on the main highways by the Taliban, the Afghanistan National Police (ANP) or thieves has led many to cultivate the crop that attracts traders to the farmgate - opium poppy. Moreover, given the role of opium in accessing land, credit and off farm income, as well as water particularly in some of the drier karez irrigated areas in the south, it looks unlikely that we will see anything more than a recalibration by farmers in the south of the minimum amount of land needed to ensure some self sufficiency in wheat production.

It is clear from the Report that Afghan farmers respond to different imperatives in different ways. Therefore it is possible to have dramatic changes in levels of cultivation year on year not only from one province to another but also between districts within a single province. Much will depend on the different socio-economic, political and environmental circumstances in which farmers find themselves. For example, government efforts to reduce opium poppy cultivation may be supported in those areas with larger landholdings by a change in the price of wheat whilst in another area with high population densities it might increase the pressure to return to opium poppy cultivation the next season. Similarly, whilst destroying, or threatening to destroy, the opium crop in an area that has viable alternatives may serve to deter cultivation the subsequent season, in another area, where insecurity and the predatory behaviour of corrupt officials hampers the flow of goods and services, eradication may exacerbate the fragile relationship between the state and its citizens. Whilst unattractive to those who wish for simple answers and quick solutions to opium production in Afghanistan, these diverging patterns of cultivation and the fact that identical measures can produce opposite affects point to the fact that developing a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the different factors that influence cultivation, and how they differ by location and socio-economic group, is probably the most important tool for delivering sustainable reductions in opium poppy cultivation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

There is a tendency for many to see counter narcotics efforts in Afghanistan as synonymous with interdiction, eradication and so-called 'alternative livelihoods' interventions. These three areas are given such focus by both policy makers and the media because they are perceived as discrete, action-orientated and easy to measure in both financial commitments and outputs. There is often the expectation that these interventions will directly lead to a reduction in the trade or production of opium. This is particularly the case for 'alternative livelihoods', a term which is often interpreted as rural livelihoods interventions that are purely aimed at reducing opium poppy cultivation instead of in the broader context of the rural economy as it should.

However, the Government of Afghanistan and its international partners have recognised that the production, trade and consumption of opium and its derivatives poses a significant threat to the country's overall development. It has also recognised that no single project or programme can address the multiple factors that have led to the expansion of opium poppy cultivation, and that a more concerted and comprehensive approach is required. Evidence in other drug crop producing countries, as well as in Afghanistan, demonstrates that it is the combination of governance, security and economic growth that will deliver the development impact required to increase household access to assets and reduce overall dependency on opium poppy cultivation. Consequently, counter narcotics has been made a cross cutting issue in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), and the National Drugs Control Strategy (NDCS) calls for counter narcotics policy to be integrated in both national and provincial plans and strategies.⁵

Whilst there are a range of government activities designed to directly tackle the narcotics issue in Afghanistan, including law enforcement efforts, such as support to the Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan (CNPA), institutional strengthening for the Ministry for Counter Narcotics (MCN), or demand reduction efforts, all require a wider institutional framework to be both effective and sustainable. For example, for interdiction efforts to result in successful prosecutions, investments in the wider judicial system is required; demand reduction efforts need to operate within a functioning health system if they are to address the underlying causes of drug use and not result in high rates of recidivism; and the MCN has to operate within a coherent government ministerial structure and a wider programme of public administrative reform if it is to be able to deliver effective leadership on counter narcotics.

There are also many other interventions that are not specifically aimed at reducing the production, trade or consumption of illicit drugs in Afghanistan but nevertheless could make significant contributions to delivering drug control outcomes. Whilst it is anticipated that many of the interventions that might have more of an indirect effect

⁵ *'...it is crucial that counter narcotics is fully integrated into the broader national development agenda as set out in the National Development Strategy and the Government Security Sector Reform programmes laid out in the National Security Policy' (Page 7) 'The Government's CN policy must occur within the context of a broader stabilisation process. CN policy must therefore be mainstreamed, that is included, and facilitated in both national and provincial plans and strategies.'* (Page 15) Ministry of Counter-Narcotics. 'National Drug Control Strategy: An Updated Five Year Strategy for Tackling the Illicit Drug Problem'. Kabul, January 2006.

on the drug control effort relate to rural livelihoods interventions, there are programmes in sectors such as transport, public works, and vocational training that could also contribute to reducing the threat that narcotics poses to Afghanistan's development.

Within the context in which counter narcotics is recognised as a cross cutting issue, there are few projects or programmes that can be considered as discrete, stand-alone 'counter narcotics' interventions and none that would by themselves result in the elimination of either the production, consumption or trade of illegal drugs. Instead achievement of counter narcotics objectives should be seen as an outcome of the wider process of state building and economic development. This is not to suggest that the drugs issue can be ignored and considered simply an externality of the development process. There is in fact a clear need to consider the effect different interventions in each of the main strands of work - security, governance and economic growth - have on the cultivation, trade and consumption of illegal drugs, and to ensure that all efforts maximise counter narcotics outcomes.

This Report explores the issue of opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan from a 'cross cutting perspective'. It looks at the different and wide ranging factors that influence opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, including those that are perceived as discrete counter narcotics interventions such as government efforts to reduce cultivation through information campaigns and eradication, as well as the impact that the wider economic and institutional environment has on the decision to plant, including growing concerns over food insecurity and corruption.

The Report is based on 475 in-depth interviews conducted in thirty-three different districts across nine provinces in Afghanistan. It explores a cross section of households across Afghanistan and attempts to explain the circumstances, socio-economic, political and environmental, which drove them to cultivate opium poppy (or not) in the 2007/08 growing season. It recognises that, given the complex and dynamic relationship between the various factors that inform household decision-making and how these are shaped by particular circumstances, it is problematic to simply ask households why they do or do not cultivate opium poppy.

Instead the report looks at the range of assets that households have at their disposal, their perceptions of the type of 'governance' that they are subject to, the services that are delivered, and the ways in which the rule of law, particularly with regard to the eradication of the opium crop, is enforced. It also identifies the possible explanations for moving in and out of opium poppy cultivation this year. The analysis in this report is not intended to be exhaustive; it is limited by sample size, the prevailing security situation, and the sensitive nature of the subject matter. There is a need to exercise caution when attempting to extrapolate the findings of this work. Despite these constraints, the report does provide valuable insights into the process of change in rural livelihoods in Afghanistan and gives voice to a population that is so often caricatured by both policy makers and the media in their debates on counter-narcotics policy in Afghanistan.

2. METHODOLOGY

This Study is the sixth in a series of annual reports funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the Government of the United Kingdom.⁶ To explore the different motivations and factors that influence opium poppy cultivation and how these differ by location and socio-economic group, fieldwork was conducted in a number of different areas in the provinces of Badakhshan, Balkh, Baghlan, Farah, Ghor, Helmand, Laghman, Nangarhar and Kandahar. Where possible, districts with very different characteristics were selected for fieldwork within each province. Typically, districts in close proximity to provincial centres that generally had better access to water, land and both agricultural commodity and labour markets, as well as at least theoretically better security, were chosen, along with more remote areas where land holdings were more marginal and market failures more commonplace.

Within these areas, interviews were conducted with households across a range of different socio-economic groups. For example, of those interviewed, 79% owned land. Of these, 9% employed others to work their land, 51% worked their own land, and the remaining 19% obtained additional land on a tenancy or sharecropping basis (sometimes both), as well as farming their own land. Just over one fifth of those interviewed owned no land at all, obtaining access to land under a sharecropping arrangement (15% of respondents), a tenancy (6% of respondents), or both (0.5% of respondents). In total, 475 in-depth interviews were undertaken in 33 districts across nine provinces in which opium poppy has been cultivated over the last few years.

Every attempt was made to visit the districts and the households where fieldwork had been conducted in previous years for this Study. Whilst it was possible to visit the majority of the districts covered at the same time in the 2006/07 growing season, security was problematic in some areas of the country. Much of the provinces of Helmand and Kandahar continued to be too insecure to undertake in-depth fieldwork, and even in the central districts access was limited to those areas nearer the provincial centre. Consequently, as opposed to the initial year of this Study in 2001/02 when fieldwork was undertaken in districts such as Kajaki and Musa Qala in Helmand, in-depth research has now become limited to some of the most accessible (and secure) districts in the southern provinces of Farah, Helmand and Kandahar.

In 2007/08 the district of Panjwai in Kandahar province, which was visited last year, was too insecure for fieldwork, as was the district of Pusht Rud in Farah. Mobility in the districts of Bala Bulok in Farah, Nawa Barakzai and Gereshk in Helmand and Maiwand in the province of Kandahar was also limited by Taliban incursions. The analysis presented in this report is therefore inevitably constrained by the bias created by concentrating fieldwork in the more secure and accessible areas of these three southern provinces.

⁶ The first report was conducted during the 2002/03 growing season for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The second was produced as a Technical Paper for the UNODC/ONDCP Second Technical Conference on Drug Control Research and covered the 2003/04 growing season. The third, fourth and fifth reports in the series were produced for the Afghan Drugs Inter Departmental Unit of the Government of the United Kingdom, the last of which is available on line at: http://www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/pdf20/fco_adidu_driversreport2006-7

There is of course a potential for bias in any research. Respondents may choose to distort or exaggerate their claims of what they have planted and what they intend to cultivate in the coming weeks. This is perhaps more so when reporting on how much opium poppy they might grow. In some areas there is a potential for respondents to underestimate the level of reporting due to being fearful of government action and concerned that surveyors may report their findings to local law enforcement officials. In other areas it is suggested that farmers might choose to exaggerate the level of planting in order to attract development assistance.

To minimise this potential bias, fieldwork was undertaken during the winter planting season rather than prior to it. This not only allowed fieldwork to obtain greater insights into the process of decision making with respect to resource allocation but also allowed the surveyors to see what was being planted, thereby checking the veracity of many of the responses. Fieldwork was also undertaken in areas where fieldworkers have established ongoing relationships with the community. This is the sixth year of fieldwork in most of the villages covered by this Study.

To reduce the potential for bias in the respondents' discussion on opium poppy cultivation, the focus of enquiry was on the different elements that make up rural livelihoods. This approach recognises that, given the complex and dynamic relationship between the various factors that inform household decision-making and how these are shaped by particular circumstances, it is problematic to simply ask households why they do or do not cultivate opium poppy. No direct questions were asked in relation to the opium crop. Experience has shown that where opium poppy is cultivated, respondents will typically include it when recounting the different crops that they grow.

It also has to be acknowledged that at the time of finalising fieldwork for this Study the winter planting season was not yet complete. Consequently, for the sample as a whole only 40% of the total amount of land that would be cultivated in the 2007/08 cropping season had already been planted. Due to agricultural practice and differing cropping seasons in the different provinces, some areas had planted a greater proportion of land to crops than others. For example, in Helmand respondents reported that 57% of the land that was to be cultivated during the winter season of 2007/08 had already been planted at the time of interview. With the tendency to cultivate opium poppy prior to wheat, this area constituted 63% of the area respondents reported that they would cultivate with opium poppy in 2007/08 but only 40% of the land they claimed they would allocate to wheat production.⁷ In the higher-altitude areas such as Ghor and Badakhshan where the majority of the land is planted in late January/early February, only 14% and 19%, respectively, of the land to be cultivated in this winter season had been planted at the time of fieldwork

While efforts have been made to mitigate the bias introduced by the location of fieldwork and what might be considered the sensitive nature of the subject matter, there is little that can be done to address the potential for a change in household

⁷ When fieldwork was completed in the first week of December in the 2006/07 growing season respondents in Helmand and Kandahar reported that they had planted 96% of the opium crop that they would be cultivating this year. See Mansfield, David (2007). Page 4. In the 2005/06 growing season those interviewed in the province of Helmand at exactly the same time reported that 94% of the land that was to be dedicated to opium poppy had already been planted. See Mansfield (2006) Page 3.

circumstances or in events that may trigger a change in projected cropping patterns. For this reason it is important to note that December 2007 saw a dramatic increase in retail wheat prices that has taken effect across the whole of Afghanistan – an upward movement in prices that provinces such as Balkh and Badakhshan had already experienced during the second and third quarter of 2007. To develop a better understanding of the impact this dramatic increase in wheat prices had on cropping patterns, further fieldwork was conducted in Helmand in February 2008, and in Nangarhar and Kandahar in April 2008.

This report also draws on the examples given and stories told by respondents of events that were pertinent to their particular circumstances. By their very nature these anecdotes are not representative of the life stories of any one particular group, but instead are illustrative of the stresses and impacts of some of the changes currently underway in rural Afghanistan. These personal narratives represent the voices of Afghan farmers that are sometimes not heard in policy debates and discussions on opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan.

While any illicit economy presents fundamental research problems, the rural household continues to be the most accessible unit of analysis when looking at the opium economy in Afghanistan. Focusing on the household also provides a basis for cross-referencing findings and, drawing on research on the role of opium poppy in rural livelihood strategies in Afghanistan over the last decade, tracing changes in the socio-economic, political and environmental processes that influence farmers in their decision to engage in illicit opium poppy cultivation.

3. CROPPING PATTERNS IN 2007/08: A TALE OF NINE PROVINCES

Key Findings

- *The provinces of Nangarhar and Laghman in the **eastern region** show remarkably low levels of opium poppy cultivation this year. As with previous bans on opium in Nangarhar, the land that was cultivated with opium poppy in 2006/07 has been replaced by wheat in the 2007/08 cropping season. However, even in areas where there were negligible levels of opium poppy cultivation over the last three years, there are signs of a preference for wheat, with farmers reducing the amount of land they allocated to annual horticultural crops last year in favour of wheat in 2007/08.*
- *In the first half of the planting season, farmers in the **southern provinces** projected that they would increase the amount of land they allocated to opium poppy but only marginally compared to the 2006/07 cropping season. Farmers anticipated this increase being at the expense of lower levels of wheat cultivation compared to 2006/07. There is, however, evidence suggesting that some farmers may have diverged from their projected increases in the amount of land allocated to opium poppy and planted wheat instead in the latter part of the winter planting season. Although there are shifts between different annual horticultural crops as the price of one falls and the other rises or as disease impacts on yields, the area cultivated with perennial and annual horticultural crops in the southern provinces has remained largely stable*
- *Despite the vast majority of land in the **northern provinces** being cultivated with wheat in 2006/07, it was anticipated that there would be further increases in the amount of land allocated to the crop in 2007/08. Farmers in the province of Balkh projected that they would not cultivate opium for a second consecutive year. In Badakhshan and Baghlan opium poppy cultivation remains limited to a few districts. The land allocated to opium poppy last year has been cultivated with wheat in 2007/08. Significant increases in wheat prices in the north had already materialised in the second and third quarter of 2007.*
- *In the province of Ghor in the **central region**, opium poppy has been largely abandoned in favour of wheat. Continued crop failure with particularly low yields in 2006/07 and falling opium prices have made opium poppy an unattractive crop.*

Decisions on which crops to plant are complex and are highly contextual. There is rarely a single determining factor that can explain changes in the amount of land allocated to a crop. A range of different socio-economic, political and environmental factors informs such decisions. The individual circumstances of households - their resources, aspirations, traditions and values - all inform the decisions they make. Moreover, the decision as to which crops are cultivated and how much land they should occupy has consequences for the other activities that make up the household's livelihood.⁸ For many farmers in Afghanistan these decisions are constrained, shaped by the social and economic structures that govern access to assets such as land, credit and labour. Institutional mechanisms and insecurity can limit market access.

In the 2006/07 cropping season, levels of opium poppy cultivation diverged so considerably that the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime referred to a 'fault line' between north and south 'that now divides the country',⁹ and the Government of the United States of America talked of 'bifurcation'.¹⁰ Once again absolute levels of cultivation are likely to contrast markedly between the regions this year, with cultivation being concentrated in the southern provinces and largely negligible in the central, northern and this time, eastern regions. However, as opposed to the 2006/07 cropping season, it would appear that the contrasting trends in cultivation that were evident last year, with increases in the south and east and reductions in the centre and north, will be far less evident. Instead there are signs of a growing preference for wheat production across many parts of the country. This section provides an overview of the changes in cropping patterns amongst those interviewed for this Study and how these differ on an intra- and inter-province basis. It also begins to look at the explanations for changing cropping patterns within the provinces covered by fieldwork and how these differ between districts.

3.1 The Eastern Region: Negligible Cultivation in Nangarhar and Laghman

The provinces of Nangarhar and Laghman in the **eastern region** show remarkably low levels of opium poppy cultivation this year considering the resurgence in production that took place in Nangarhar in the 2006/07 growing season. In Nangarhar the land that was cultivated with opium poppy in 2006/07 is largely wheat in the 2007/08 cropping season. In Laghman there are signs of falling levels of opium poppy, but given such low levels of cultivation in 2006/07 the fall is far from as dramatic as in the neighbouring province of Nangarhar. There are however signs of some marginal increases in the level of wheat cultivation even in Laghman, as respondents possibly began to react to the fall in the price of some annual horticultural

⁸ 'No rural family can consider their agricultural resources, asset and activities in anything less than a holistic fashion, despite the inconvenience of this to institutional mandates, budget lines and aid portfolios. Arable and horticultural crops, livestock, trade networks, soil, water and weather, off farm activities and remittances must all be considered as part of the complex whole that makes up a family's livelihood'. Anthony Fitzherbert in 'Rural resilience and diversity across Afghanistan's agricultural landscapes' in *Reconstructing Agriculture in Afghanistan* ed. by Adam Pain and Jacky Sutton. Practical Action Publishing. 2007. Page 32

⁹ Ministry of Counter Narcotics/United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2007) Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007. MCN/UNODC: Kabul. Page iii

¹⁰ United State Government, 2007. U.S Counter narcotics Strategy for Afghanistan. Compiled by the Coordinator for Counter narcotics and Justice Reform in Afghanistan. Page 24

crops, in particular onion, and the beginning of the dramatic rise in wheat prices experienced across the country.

3.1.1 Nangarhar

In the 2007/08 growing season the story in Nangarhar province is one of wholesale abandonment of opium poppy. For example, whilst three-quarters of those interviewed reported that they had cultivated opium poppy in the 2006/07 growing season, none produced opium in the 2007/08 growing season. Clearly the crop has not been cultivated in the more accessible districts adjacent to the provincial centre, such as Surkhrud, as cultivation has been negligible in this area since the 2004/05 growing season. Cultivation has however also been abandoned this year in the more remote districts, such as Shinwar, Khogiani, Chapahar and Achin,¹¹ where the vast majority of those interviewed had cultivated opium poppy in 2006/07,

In fact the very low level of poppy cultivation in Achin district¹² is indicative of the comprehensive nature of the ban across the province in 2007/08. Achin is one of the few districts where opium poppy has been monocropped by many farmers and where cultivation persisted in the 2004/05 growing season, despite a 96% reduction in levels of cultivation across the province as a whole. Even in 2000/01, at the time of the Taliban prohibition on opium poppy cultivation, in Achin district the implementation of the ban was one of negotiation rather than imposition.¹³ Indeed, at the time of fieldwork in early December 2007, respondents were making the comparison with 2000/01 (see Box 1).

Box 1

'This is the same as the Taliban ban in Achin. At that time I didn't have any food in my house. I went to one of my neighbours and they gave me 200 Pakistani Rupees (PR). I gave the money to my son to go to the bazaar for some maize flour. He bought 2 seers [of flour] from shadal bazaar and returned home. Along the way a beggar took the flour from my son. When my son arrived home he told me what happened. When I went to the home of that person he asked me: 'what am I to do. I have no food for my family'. This year is the same year.'

Achin District, Nangarhar

The reduction in opium poppy across the province is dramatic but not unprecedented. As in the 2000/01 growing season and in 2004/05, the land that was cultivated with opium poppy the previous year was replaced, or would be according to respondents, by wheat. Reports suggested that the planting of the wheat crop was delayed until early December to see whether the authorities would shift their position on an outright ban on opium poppy cultivation. Consequently, as of the first week of December 2007 when fieldwork finished in Nangarhar, respondents reported that they had planted on average 50% of the total amount of land they would dedicate to wheat in the 2007/08 growing season, compared to 55% of a much smaller area of land to be dedicated to the wheat crop in the same period in 2006.

The extent of wheat cultivation is such that 52% of those interviewed reported that they would monocrop wheat in the 2007/08 growing season, and 90% of respondents

¹¹ Fieldwork by the author and a team of national colleagues in April 2008 confirmed this.

¹² There were reports of low levels of cultivation in Mohmand Valley in Achin

¹³ See Mansfield, David (2006) Opium poppy cultivation in the provinces of Nangarhar and Ghor' A report for AREU's Applied Thematic Research into Water Management, Livestock and the Opium Economy. AREU, Kabul. December.

reported that more than half of their land would be dedicated to wheat production. This compares with only one respondent who monocropped wheat in 2006/07 – and only 28% of those interviewed dedicating more than half their land to wheat in 2006/07.¹⁴ All of the respondents who claimed that less than half of their land would be cultivated with wheat in 2007/08 resided in the district of Surkhrud, where the cultivation of horticultural crops was found to be far more extensive.

What is notable amongst respondents in Nangarhar is the degree of consistency in the proportion of cultivable land that is dedicated to horticulture and fodder crops. In the districts of Chapahar and Achin the data suggest that there is no change at all in the amount of land dedicated to these crops. In Shinwar district there is some increase in the amount of land dedicated to alfalfa, largely explained by the shortage of wheat straw for livestock during the 2006/07 season due to the low levels of wheat cultivation in the district that year.

The more pronounced change is in the district of Surkhrud where respondents report a shift away from onion production into wheat, with a resultant fall in the proportion of land dedicated to the onion crop, from 25% in 2006/07 to 20% in 2007/08. One-third of those interviewed in Surkhrud district reported that they had reduced the amount of land they allocated to onion, with one respondent abandoning the crop altogether this year. All but one of these respondents increased the amount of land they cultivated with wheat in 2007/08 compared to the previous year. All blamed a reduction in the farmgate price for onion during the harvest in June 2007.

Box 2:

'I have been busy in Surkhrud for four years growing onion. I am from Surkhrud but I don't have any land. In 2002 I cultivated opium poppy in Sommerkhel in Behsud. I got 6 jeribs of land there as a sharecropper. Near to the harvest time the government eradicated my crop. When they started the eradication my wife and all my children were crying. After that I decided that I would not cultivate poppy. I came back to Surkhrud and started to cultivate onion on 2.5 jeribs of land that I got as a sharecropper and on lease. I sold this crop for 100,000 PR. Now I cultivate 3 jeribs of land with onion. I have one house and also one flourmill. During the season I work in my field and I am busy with my flourmill. I am happy with my life.'

Surkhrud District, Nangarhar

The proportion of land allocated to other horticultural and fodder crops amongst respondents in Surkhrud remained relatively static, with on average alfalfa occupying 4.5 % of the land cultivated, spinach 3.6%, okra 3%, carrot 1.5% and garlic 1.8% compared to 4.5% to alfalfa, 3.4% to spinach, 3.1% to okra, 1.7% to carrot and 0.7% of cultivated land to garlic in the 2006/07 growing season. Yet despite the fall in onion prices and some contraction of the crop in favour of wheat cultivation in 2006/07, one third of the total cultivable land of those interviewed was dedicated to horticulture and fodder crops – eight times more land than was allocated to this category of crops in the district of Chapahar and 83 times more land grown with horticultural and fodder crops than that of respondents in Achin district. The continued cultivation of such extensive horticultural and fodder crops reflects the districts' proximity to the markets of Jalalabad and Kabul and the benefits many

¹⁴ Over one third of those interviewed (36%) reported monocropping opium poppy in the 2006/07 growing season and 54% claimed to have allocated more than half their land to opium poppy.

farmers from this area have derived from the growth in the demand for these crops (see Box 2). As one respondent from Surkhrud commented, *'even if the government allows poppy cultivation I will not grow it. The income from onion is better than poppy'*.¹⁵

Table 1: Percentage of household land dedicated to different crops, in Nangarhar and selected districts

	Cultivated land (Jeribs)	Wheat		Other		Poppy		Fruit	
		2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)
NANGARHAR	6.9	35.0	95.2	15.2	14.8	49.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
Achin	4.4	6.1	99.2	0.8	0.8	93.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
Chapahar	6.5	42.0	93.4	6.6	6.6	51.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
Khogiani	6.3	31.3	93.8	7.4	6.2	61.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
Shinwar	7.5	12.8	95	4.6	5	82.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
Surkhrud	9.7	61.2	65.7	38.8	34.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

3.1.2 Laghman

There is also some evidence of a shift to wheat cultivation amongst respondents in the province of Laghman neighbouring Nangarhar. However, this shift has been marginal and the extent differs by district. It is only in the district of Alingar, where opium was produced in 2006/07, that the shift to wheat can be largely attributed to a reduction in opium poppy cultivation this season. In this district, four respondents report that they have abandoned opium poppy cultivation, three of them directly substituting the land that they had cultivated with opium poppy last year with wheat in 2007/08 and one using the land that had been cultivated with opium poppy in 2006/07 to double the amount of land allocated to potato from one jerib to two jeribs in 2007/08. A further three respondents, all located in a particularly dry and remote part of the district, known as Saw Qalat, reported that they would persist with opium poppy cultivation this year, but none of them increased the amount of land they dedicated to the crop.

More marginal increases in wheat cultivation were reported in the districts of Mehtarlam and Alishang. In Mehtarlam three of those interviewed reported that would increase the amount of land they dedicated to wheat. All of them had reduced the amount of land they had allocated to potato the previous season to do so. Two of them were not producing potato at all in the 2007/08 growing season. All three respondents argued that the price that they had received for their potato crop was insufficient to meet the costs of production. In the district of Alishang, increases in wheat cultivation in 2007/08 came at the cost of reductions in the amount of land allocated to onion and alfalfa as well as one respondent obtaining more land under a sharecropping arrangement.

In Qarghai district, however, respondents reported that they would allocate a smaller amount of their land to wheat in 2007/08. One of those interviewed reduced the amount of land that he would allocate to wheat by seven jeribs compared to the 2006/07 growing season. All of this land was to be cultivated with cucumber in 2007/08. In fact two-thirds of those interviewed cultivated cucumber and one third of

¹⁵ This is no longer the case now that the price has fallen. Fieldwork April 2008.

respondents in the district reported that they would increase the amount of land they dedicated to the crop. So much so that the average amount of household land allocated to cucumber increased from 5% to 10% between 2006/07 and 2007/08. Other respondents reduced the level of potato and onion cultivation in order to increase the amount of land they could allocate to cucumber in 2007/08. Respondents reported levels of cotton, okra, tomato, alfalfa, squash and sugar cane remaining largely the same as they were in the 2006/07 growing season.

In Nangarhar, the cultivation of horticultural and fodder crops was limited amongst the respondents in Achin, Chapahar, Khogiani and Shinwar. It was only in Surkhrud district adjacent to the provincial centre that more extensive cultivation took place. In the province of Laghman, on the other hand, respondents in all the districts except Alingar cultivated more than 10% of their land to horticultural and fodder crops, with those interviewed in Qarghai dedicating almost one quarter of their land to these crops. As with the district of Surkhrud in Nangarhar, Qarghai, Mehtarlam and Alishang have all benefited from the improvements to the Kabul to Jalalabad road and better access to the vegetable market in Kabul.

Table 2: Percentage of household land dedicated to different crops, in Laghman and selected districts

	Cultivated land (Jeribs)	Wheat		Other		Poppy		Fruit	
		2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)
LAGHMAN	9.9	76.2	82.0	17.5	17.1	6.1	0.7	0.2	0.2
Alingar	6.6	57.1	88.4	6.6	7.6	36.4	4.0	0.0	0.0
Alishang	11.4	83.7	86.4	16.3	13.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Qarghai	18.6	77.2	76.0	22.4	23.7	0	0.0	0.4	0.4
Mehtarlam	9.1	83.8	87.5	16.2	12.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

3.2 The Southern Provinces: Helmand, Farah and Kandahar

What is notable across those interviewed in the southern region is that as opposed to other provinces where wheat occupies the majority of the land cultivated, in Helmand, Farah and Kandahar it is opium poppy that dominates in many of the districts. The most extreme situation is in the districts of Nad e Ali, Nawa Barakzai, Gereshk, Maiwand and Bala Bulok, where respondents report that more than half of the land that they will cultivate in the 2007/08 growing season will be cultivated with opium poppy. In the districts of Daman and Arghandab, those interviewed report that they intended to cultivate more than one-third of their land with opium poppy this year. It is only in the districts in which the provincial centre is located, Lashkar Gah in Helmand province, Dand in Kandahar province and Farah district in the province of Farah, that opium is reported to occupy, on average, less than one-quarter of household land in the 2007/08 growing season.

Yet despite the prevalence of opium poppy amongst respondents in the southern region, there are very a few that monocrop it. The vast majority cultivate a combination of winter sown crops including wheat, annual horticultural crops, fodder for livestock and other crops such as cotton and cannabis that are grown early and before the opium crop is harvested as well as perennial horticultural crops such as vines, pomegranates and apricots. Of course, patterns of cultivation vary by household

and by district, with some areas such as the districts of Arghandab, Panjwai, Dand and Daman in Kandahar, and Lashkar Gah in Helmand, having more extensive orchards and vineyards and areas of vegetable production than others.

What is notably apparent from the fieldwork in the southern region is the relative stability in the area cultivated with perennial and annual horticultural crops over the last two seasons. There are shifts between different annual horticultural crops as the price of one falls and the other rises or as disease impacts on yields. It is even possible to see farmers who reside in close proximity to each other reaching diametrically opposite conclusions regarding the crops they will grow that same season.

Yet despite these changes in the actual crops cultivated each year, the area allocated to annual horticultural crops and fodder seems to remain broadly the same. There is little evidence of either expansion or contraction, and this is despite the areas covered by this Study being in close proximity to the provincial centres and therefore the main market for horticultural crops. Instead, changes in cropping patterns seem to be largely limited to the levels of wheat and opium poppy cultivated with expansions in opium poppy cultivation being offset with contractions in the amount of land allocated to wheat and vice versa.

3.2.1 Helmand

Those interviewed in Helmand province in November/December 2007 reported that there would not be a significant change in the amount of land they dedicated to different crops in the 2007/08 cropping season compared with 2006/07, but there would be some shift between the amount of land allocated to wheat and opium. Reports of reductions in the proportion of land dedicated to wheat were matched with reductions in the number of respondents cultivating the crop. For example, four of those interviewed (all in the district of Gereshk) reported that they would abandon wheat altogether in 2007/08, and ten additional respondents indicated that they would reduce the amount of land they allocated to the crop in comparison with the previous year. Of all those interviewed in Helmand province, only two respondents reported that they intended to increase the amount of land they dedicated to wheat.

In fact, 30% of those interviewed in Helmand reported that they intended to increase the amount of land they allocated to opium poppy in 2007/08 compared with 2006/07, and all but one respondent reported that this increase would be at the expense of wheat cultivation. This one exception was a respondent in the district of Gereshk who reported that he had four more jeribs of land under cultivation in 2007/08 than in the 2006/07 growing season, one jerib of which had been cultivated with wheat and three jeribs allocated to opium poppy.

All of those interviewed in Nawa Barakzai, Gereshk and Nad e Ali reported that they would cultivate opium poppy this season. It was only in Lashkar Gah where a minority of those interviewed reported cultivating opium poppy - both in 2006/07 and in 2007/08. In fact two respondents (the only two of those interviewed in Helmand) reported that they had abandoned opium poppy in 2007/08 after cultivating it the previous year. One, a sharecropper who cultivated twelve jeribs of land had cultivated three jeribs of opium poppy in 2006/07, four jeribs of wheat, one jerib of cucumber, one jerib of alfalfa, two jeribs of cotton, and one jerib of spinach. This respondent reported that he intended to replace the three jeribs of land he had cultivated with

opium poppy last year with one jerib of onion, one jerib of tomato and a further jerib of spinach in the 2007/08 growing season. The other respondent who reported that he would abandon opium poppy in 2007/08 claimed he would replace the two jeribs of land he had dedicated to opium poppy in 2006/07 with one jerib of watermelon and one jerib of wheat in 2007/08. Neither of these respondents reported that their opium crop had been destroyed in 2007, although one claimed his crop had been eradicated in 2004/05, the other in the 2005/06 growing season

Respondents in the district of Lashkar Gah reported marginal increases in the proportion of land allocated to horticultural and fodder crops in 2007/08 compared with 2006/07. They also reported a greater proportion of household land allocated to orchards at almost one fifth of the land, compared to less than 5% in the other districts of Helmand covered by this Study. Proximity to the market in the provincial centre is clearly a factor for the high proportion of land allocated to these crops amongst respondents in Lashkar Ghar. However, key informants also report that a hardpan of calcified conglomerate 60 centimetres below the topsoil in Nad e Ali partly explains the low level of cultivation of perennial horticulture in this particular district.¹⁶

In the district of Lashkar Gah the increase in horticultural and fodder crops was at the expense of both wheat and to some extent opium poppy. However, a shift between different horticultural crops is also evident. Tomato, onion and spinach have been largely favoured. Watermelon on the other hand has seen an increase in levels of planting in Lashkar Gar and a contraction in Gereshk and Nad e Ali. In Gereshk the contraction in the amount of land allocated to watermelon was attributed to low prices and disease. It was reported that the land freed up by reducing the level of cultivation of watermelon would be used for opium poppy cultivation in 2007/08. Yet in Nad e Ali a respondent with seventeen jeribs of land reported that he would maintain cultivation of wheat and opium poppy at 2006/07 levels but would use the three jeribs of land he had allocated to water melon that year for cotton in the 2007/08 growing season.

	Cultivated land (Jeribs)	Wheat		Other		Poppy		Fruit	
		2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)
HELMAND	15.5	22.0	18.7	25.1	25.1	48.2	51.6	4.7	4.6
Gereshk	16.7	22.0	17.9	20	19.4	55.6	60.3	2.4	2.4
Lashkar Gah	11.3	25.9	20.3	39.9	43.6	16.5	18.4	17.7	17.7
Nad e Ali	16.5	20.2	18.0	21.0	19.5	58.9	62.5	0.0	0.0
Nawa Barakzai	24.0	22.2	20.8	22.2	23.6	55.6	55.6	0.0	0.0

3.2.2 Kandahar

As with respondents in Helmand, there is a tendency for farmers in Kandahar to shift between wheat and opium poppy cultivation rather than to replace land cultivated with perennial or annual horticulture with wheat or opium. Consequently, the marginal increase in opium poppy cultivation reported by those interviewed in the

¹⁶ Interview with Chemonics staff in February 2008.

province of Kandahar is offset by a contraction in the amount of land allocated to wheat.

The shift from wheat to opium poppy is the most pronounced in Maiwand district. Indeed, 45% of those interviewed in Maiwand reported that they had increased the amount of land they had allocated to opium poppy in 2007/08, all but one of them by reducing the amount of land they had cultivated with wheat compared to 2006/07. Two respondents claimed they would allocate all their land to opium poppy – the only two respondents of those interviewed in the province to report monocropping opium poppy. One of these respondents reported that he had managed to obtain twelve jeribs of land on lease in 2007/08 compared to only four jeribs last year. He claimed that he intended to cultivate all twelve jeribs of this leased land as well as the eight jeribs of land he owned with opium poppy. In 2006/07 he had cultivated only eight jeribs of opium poppy and four with wheat. He also claimed that his crop had been eradicated in both the 2004/05 and the 2005/06 growing seasons but had been untouched in 2006/07. The other respondent that claimed he would only cultivate opium poppy in 2007/08 had also monocropped opium during the 2006/07 growing season. He reported that his crop had never been eradicated.

In the other three districts of Kandahar province covered by this Study, there was not such a pronounced ‘zero-sum game’ between opium poppy cultivation and wheat as there was in the district of Maiwand. For example, in the district of Arghandab reductions in wheat cultivation were offset with increases in the amount of land allocated to spinach, onion, eggplant, tomato and cucumber, as well as the ubiquitous opium poppy. In Dand district a respondent managed to increase both wheat and opium poppy cultivation in 2007/08 in comparison to 2006/07 by leasing more land. Whilst in Daman a respondent reported reducing the amount of land he allocated to opium poppy by two jeribs (to two jeribs) compared to 2006/07 so that he could increase the amount of land allocated to both wheat (to four jeribs) and onion (to two jeribs) in 2007/08 due to the good yield and price he had obtained the previous season.

Amongst those interviewed in Kandahar, perennial horticulture occupies on average around one fifth of the total cultivated land. However there are significant differences in the proportion of land respondents claim that they allocate to perennial and annual horticulture and fodder crops as between the districts of Dand, Daman and Arghandab and Maiwand. For example, on average the amount of land allocated to annual horticultural crops and fodder amongst respondents in Maiwand is half that of those in Dand and Arghandab. And whilst those interviewed in Maiwand district report that they cultivate small amounts of alfalfa and tomato, in the district of Arghandab the list includes cucumber, tomato, onion, spinach, eggplant and okra, cauliflower, celery and ‘gandoneh’¹⁷. The distance to the provincial centre and the main market for annual horticultural crops is clearly a factor here, particularly given that respondents in Maiwand district were on average located 62.5 km from Kandahar city compared to an average of 8.5 km for those interviewed in Dand, 12 km for those in Daman and 16 km for those interviewed in the district of Arghandab.

¹⁷ Gandoneh is a perennial *Alium* sp. Cropped similar to chives and used as salad. It is often mistranslated as leek. Anthony Fitzherbert, personal communication

Table 4: Percentage of household land dedicated to different crops, in Kandahar and selected districts

	Cultivated land (Jeribs)	Wheat		Other		Poppy		Fruit	
		2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)
KANDAHAR	12.0	25.2	22.1	14.1	14.1	39.4	42.5	21.3	21.4
Arghandab	12.8	22.4	19.3	16.1	16.2	38.0	39.2	23.4	25.3
Daman	13.1	24.3	21.9	11.0	12.1	33.3	34.4	31.4	31.6
Dand	6.5	40.2	38.8	34.0	32.0	19.6	23.3	6.2	5.8
Maiwand	15.9	22.0	17.3	6.7	6.4	53.1	59.0	18.1	17.3

3.2.3 Farah

As with Kandahar and Helmand, respondents in the two districts of Farah where security allowed fieldwork to be conducted reported marginal increases in the amount of land allocated to opium poppy. Again, as with those interviewed in Helmand and Kandahar, wheat was found to occupy, on average, as little as one-quarter of the cultivable land of respondents in Farah. However, in contrast to respondents in the other two southern provinces, the marginal increase in opium poppy cultivation was at the expense of annual horticultural crops and not wheat.

In the district of Farah, all of those interviewed reported that they would maintain the same level of wheat cultivation as in the 2006/07 growing season. Only one respondent reported that he would increase the amount of land allocated to opium poppy in 2007/08 compared with 2006/07. To increase opium production (from 13 jeribs in 2006/07 to 14 jeribs in 2007/08), this respondent reported that he would reduce the amount of land allocated to watermelon from five jeribs in 2006/07 to four jeribs in the 2007/08 growing season. Like other farmers in the southern region including two respondents in Bala Bulok, they complained of low prices for watermelon and poor yields last year.

In Bala Bulok district only one respondent reported declining levels of wheat cultivation in 2007/08 compared with 2006/07, blaming the smaller amount of land he had obtained as a sharecropper this year. Three of those interviewed reported that they would increase the amount of land allocated to opium poppy in 2007/08, but none reported lower levels of wheat cultivation compared with last year. One of these respondents obtained a further one jerib of land under a sharecropper arrangement; and two intended to reduce the amount of land they allocated to watermelon compared with 2006/07 so that they could use the land for opium production.

In the district of Bala Bulok it was a minority of those interviewed that reported cultivating annual horticultural crops for sale. For example, only one of those interviewed reported growing onion. Similarly it was a lone respondent who intended to cultivate tomato and then only one jerib. Cucumber and water melon appeared to be favoured by three of those interviewed, reporting that they would cultivate the former in 2007/08 and five respondents suggesting they would cultivate water melon in the coming season. This is in contrast with the district of Farah, where a third of those interviewed cultivated tomato, onion and watermelon, two-thirds cultivated cucumber and where annual horticulture and fodder crops were reported to occupy, on average, 41.7% of the cultivable land of those interviewed.

Table 5: Percentage of household land dedicated to different crops, in Farah and selected districts

	Cultivated land (Jeribs)	Wheat		Other		Poppy		Fruit	
		2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)
FARAH	12.3	27.4	26.4	27.7	26.4	43.8	46.0	1.1	1.1
Bala Bulok	16.8	25.4	23.8	20.6	19.4	52.4	55.2	1.6	1.6
Farah	7.7	31.9	32.2	43.1	41.7	25.0	26.1	0.0	0.0

3.3 The Northern Region: Badakhshan, Balkh, and Baghlan

In the northern provinces of Badakhshan, Baghlan, and Balkh, wheat is by far the most dominant crop on both irrigated and rainfed land. It occupies on average four fifths of the cultivated land of those interviewed in Badakhshan and almost two thirds of the cultivated land of respondents in Balkh and Baghlan. Wheat is the predominant crop on the rainfed land, which makes up the largest share of cultivable land in the northern region.

Opium poppy is very much a minor crop, occupying at most 10% of the land of those interviewed in the district of Anderab in Baghlan in the 2007/08 growing season and on average 8% of the cultivable land of respondents in the district of Jurm in Badakhshan. In the other districts covered by his Study, respondents reported that opium poppy would occupy less than 3% of the land they would cultivate in the 2007/08 growing season. In fact, in each of the districts more land was allocated to annual horticultural and fodder crops in 2007/08 than to opium poppy.

However, this was not always the case. In the district of Jurm respondents reported cultivating one fifth of their cultivable land with opium poppy in 2006/07. In the districts of Anderab and Tala Wa Barfak in Baghlan there is a notable shift away from opium poppy cultivation. There is also a discernible shift towards wheat cultivation but not only at the expense of opium poppy as was more evident in Nangarhar in eastern Afghanistan but also due to a contraction in the amount of land allocated to horticultural and fodder crops.

3.3.1 Badakhshan

Wheat is by far the most dominant crop amongst respondents in the province of Badakhshan this season. It is cultivated by all those interviewed in the districts of Jurm and Keshem and all but one respondent in the district of Faizabad. Almost half of those interviewed in Badakhshan reported that they would increase the amount of land they allocated to wheat in 2007/08 compared to 2006/07, the majority citing the price of wheat as a stimulus. So much so that respondents report that on average four-fifths of the land that they will cultivate in 2007/08 will be allocated to wheat compared to two-thirds in the 2006/07 growing season.

Much, but not all of this increase in wheat cultivation will be at the expense of opium poppy cultivation. All of those who report that they will reduce the amount of land

they dedicate to opium poppy in 2007/08 report that they will also increase the level of wheat cultivation this year. However, the reported expansion in wheat cultivation this year is not solely at the expense of opium poppy. This would not have been possible given the low levels of opium poppy cultivation reported in Keshem and Faizabad in the 2006/07 growing season.

In the district of Jurm, 70% of those interviewed report that they will be reducing the amount of land they allocate to opium poppy in 2007/08 compared with the 2006/07 growing season. Three-quarters of these respondents claim there will be a direct substitution from opium poppy into wheat, with every jerib of land that was opium poppy last year being used to expand wheat cultivation in this growing season. The other 25% of respondents report a partial substitution, with an expansion in the amount of land cultivated with wheat at the expense of a reduction in both the level of opium poppy cultivation and barley compared with 2006/07. Cultivation of all other crops including patak, alfalfa, onion and potato was reported to remain unchanged from 2006/07.

Similar shifts in levels of cultivation are also seen in Faizabad, with considerable reductions in the amount of land allocated to barley in 2007/08 compared to 2006/07.¹⁸ In fact, in Faizabad respondents reported that on average the amount of land allocated to barley had fallen by almost one-third from 4.2 jeribs in 2006/07 to 1.6 jeribs in 2007/08 growing season. Again, as in the district of Jurm the contraction in the level of barley cultivation is offset with an increase in the amount of land allocated to wheat. Respondents in Keshem report reductions in the amount of land allocated to barley but far less significant than in Jurm or Faizabad.

What is also notable in Keshem and Faizabad is the range of different crops cultivated. For example, in Faizabad respondents report thirteen different crops including wheat and opium poppy, in Keshem ten different crops are reported by those interviewed. In Jurm respondents' report only eight different horticultural and fodder crops as well as a lower proportion of land allocated to them.

Table 6: Percentage of household land dedicated to different crops, in Badakhshan and selected districts

	Cultivated land (Jeribs)	Wheat		Other		Poppy		Fruit	
		2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)
BADAKHSHAN	19.3	66.1	79.1	25.5	17.9	8.2	2.7	0.2	0.2
Faizabad	22.6	64.5	80.5	31.1	18.4	3.8	0.6	0.6	0.6
Jurm	18.2	58.0	77.6	20.8	14.1	21.2	8.2	0.0	0.0
Keshem	17.1	76.2	78.8	22.7	21.2	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0

3.3.2 Balkh

At the provincial level there is a notable stability in the amount of land allocated to wheat, opium poppy, perennial horticulture and annual horticulture and fodder in the province of Balkh. There is none of the dramatic increase in the amount of land

¹⁸ Barley is grown for grain but also as a summer crop to provide green forage for stock in the late summer/autumn. Anthony Fitzherbert, personal communication

allocated to wheat that is reported by respondents in Badakhshan. There are also none of the reductions in opium poppy that were reported in Badakhshan due to the successful implementation of a ban on the crop in Balkh in the 2006/07 growing season. Instead, cultivation remains largely stable across each of the different categories of crops and across the different districts covered by the Study.

There were, however, a number of respondents (40%) who reported that they intended to increase the amount of land that they would allocate to wheat this season. These respondents consistently commented on the high price of wheat and the need for higher levels of wheat cultivation to meet household food requirements as justification for increasing the amount of land allocated to wheat this season. Some of these increases in wheat cultivation were however partly offset by others (20%) who claimed that they would reduce the level wheat cultivation in 2007/08 compared to the 2006/07 growing season. Each of those who reported that they would reduce the amount of land they allocated to wheat in 2007/08 compared with 2006/07 also reported that they would increase the level of cotton cultivation this year.

In fact, cotton is reported to occupy on average 14% of the total land cultivated by respondents in the province in the 2007/08 growing season, and is grown by almost three-quarters of those interviewed in Balkh. This is a far higher incidence of cotton cultivation than in any other province covered by this Study. Although a number of respondents did report that they would increase the level of cotton cultivation this year in comparison to 2006/07, the vast majority of those who cultivated the crop reported that they would allocate the same amount of land to cotton in 2007/08 as they had in the previous year. Only one reported that he would reduce the amount of land allocated to cotton compared with 2006/07, substituting it for wheat in the 2007/08 growing season.

Only two respondents who cultivated cotton also reported cultivating marijuana (*Cannabis Sativa*), known as charas; one was located in the district of Chemtal the other in Balkh district. This is despite the increasing incidence of marijuana that is reported in the province,¹⁹ some of which is, according to key informants, intercropped with cotton. With yields up to fifteen kg per jerib and prices ranging from 1,200 to 3,000 Afs per kg depending on quality, the returns on charas are reported to be relatively attractive. The low labour input and the high quality associated with charas from Balkh province, as well as the potential to intercrop charas with cotton, all serve to further increase the net returns per unit of land.

As with respondents in Badakhshan, there is some evidence of a reduction in the amount of land allocated to barley in 2007/08 compared with the 2006/07 growing season. The crop is cultivated more extensively by those interviewed in the district of Charbolak where over two-thirds of respondents cultivated barley compared to a third or less in the district of Balkh, Chemtal and Shulgara. As with Badakhshan there was a resounding view that barley had suffered from both low yields and a low price in 2006/07, resulting in a smaller proportion of cultivable land being allocated to the crop in 2007/08 in the districts of Shulgara, Charbolak and Chemtal.

¹⁹ 'Cannabis cultivation has also spread to the north of Afghanistan, and is observed to have increased particularly in Balkh province. UNODC/MCN 2007. Page 59.

There are also reports of reductions in the amount of land allocated to melon in the province of Balkh in the 2007/08 growing season compared to the 2006/07. Of the 31 respondents cultivating the crop in Balkh, one-third reported that they would reduce the number of jeribs allocated to it in 2007/08, complaining of disease. In the district of Charbolak, respondents report a potential increase in the extent of melon cultivation in 2007/08 and attribute this to yield improvements. Across most of the other crops cultivated by respondents, including tomato, onion, cucumber, watermelon, alfalfa, flax, sesame, pea, okra, garlic, cauliflower and cumin, very few changes in the level of cultivation were reported.

	Cultivated land (Jeribs)	Wheat		Other		Poppy		Fruit	
		2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)
BALKH	25.6	62.8	65.0	36.7	34.8	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.2
Balkh	31.5	66.7	69.1	32.4	30.7	0.6	0.0	0.2	0.2
Charbolak	28.2	61.0	63.8	38.7	36.2	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
Chemtal	21.7	59.5	60.4	40.5	39.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Shulgara	20.7	62.3	64.6	37.1	34.7	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.6

3.3.3 Baghlan

Respondents in the province of Baghlan report a more discernable shift to wheat cultivation in 2007/08 than in Balkh, but not as pronounced as in Badakhshan. In fact, almost half of those interviewed report that they would increase the amount of land they allocated to wheat in 2007/08 compared with 2006/07. The vast majority cited the increasing price of wheat as the reasons for this shift. However, increasing levels of wheat cultivation cannot, as in other provinces, be treated as distinct from the contractions in the amount of land allocated to opium poppy in some of the districts of Baghlan province.

Indeed, based on discussions with those interviewed in Baghlan, opium poppy cultivation was not widespread in 2006/07 but concentrated in the districts of Anderab and Tala Wa Barfak, although even in these districts it occupied less than 20% and 10%, respectively, of the cultivable land of those interviewed. In the 2007/08 growing season, three-quarters of those cultivating opium poppy reported that they would reduce the amount of land they allocated to the crop compared with 2006/07, and five respondents reported that they would abandon opium poppy this year. Every respondent reporting a decrease in opium poppy cultivation between 2006/07 and 2007/08 reports that this land will be used to expand cultivation of wheat this year. Two respondents not only reported reallocating land from opium poppy cultivation to wheat in the 2007/08 growing season but also from hashish: one reporting that the crop had been banned by the cleric in the local madrassah in the district of Tala Wa Barfak; the other, in the district of Anderab, reported reducing both opium poppy and charas cultivation by three jeribs, blaming the abandonment of marijuana on low yields.

In fact, in the district of Tala Wa Barfak the increase in the amount of land allocated

to wheat compared with 2006/07 is solely due to the abandonment of opium poppy and charas this season. In the district of Anderab, however, both opium poppy cultivation and charas persist but at reduced levels. The reduction in the amount of land dedicated to opium poppy is more pronounced, falling from an average of 18% of cultivable land in 2006/07 to 11.5% in 2007/08, compared to charas where cultivation was anticipated to fall from only 12% of cultivable land in 2006/07 to 10% this year. In Anderab district, increasing levels of wheat cultivation in 2007/08 are also explained by smaller amounts of land being allocated to barley and onion compared with 2006/07 due to low yields.

Increases in the level of wheat cultivation reported in the districts of Baghlan and Pul e Khumri this season cannot be attributed to reductions in the amount of land allocated to opium poppy. In Pul e Khumri it is a contraction in the amount of land allocated to potato and melon in 2007/08 compared to the 2006/07 growing season that allows an expansion in wheat cultivation. For example, respondents reported that the amount of land that would be allocated to potato would fall from an average of 11% to 8% of cultivated land. Those who reduced cultivation reported that the returns on potato last year did not meet the cost of production and transporting the crop to market. Reductions in the amount of land allocated to melon, down from 8% of the cultivated land of those interviewed in 2006/07 to 5% in 2007/08, were attributed to disease. In the district of Baghlan similar marginal reductions in the amount of land allocated to melon, cotton, potato, tomato and onion in 2007/08 compared with 2006/07 allowed an expansion in the amount of land allocated to wheat this season.

	Cultivated land (Jeribs)	Wheat		Other		Poppy		Fruit	
		2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)
BAGHLAN	15.3	61.4	67.1	31.4	27.5	3.9	2.0	3.3	3.4
Anderab	10.5	43.0	50.9	35.4	33.3	18.4	11.5	3.2	4.2
Baghlan	23.7	72.5	77.0	26.7	22.2	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.8
Pul e Khumri	23.6	53.1	58.3	40.4	35.3	0.0	0.0	6.5	6.5
Tala Wa Barfak	4.9	83.0	90.4	6.1	7.0	8.2	0.0	2.7	2.5

3.4 The Central Region: The Province of Ghor

With the derisory yields obtained from opium poppy in the province of Ghor last year it is surprising that anyone reports growing the crop in 2007/08. Although some respondents reported that they would persist with opium poppy cultivation, most reported they would abandon the crop altogether this year in favour of wheat.

3.4.1 Ghor

As in the northern region, wheat cultivation dominates in the province of Ghor, occupying over four-fifths of the land of respondents in the districts of Chaghcharan and Dawlat Yar. All of those interviewed for the purpose of this Study reported that they would cultivate wheat in the 2007/08 growing season. Given the proportion of cultivated land that respondents indicated they allocated to wheat in the 2006/07

growing season, there would appear to be little scope for further increases in the level of cultivation in 2007/08. However, respondents did anticipate marginal increases in the level of wheat cultivation in the 2007/08 growing season but largely at the expense of reductions in the level of opium poppy cultivation in the districts of Chaghcharan and Dawlat Yar.

It is certainly clear that opium poppy cultivation, reported on average on less than 5% of the land cultivated by respondents in Ghor, remains a marginal crop. Yields were particularly low in the 2006/07 growing season often obtaining less than 1.5 kg per jerib²⁰ In Dawlat Yar all of those that cultivated opium poppy in the 2006/07 growing season reported that they would reduce the amount of land they allocated to the crop in 2007/08 growing season. In fact all but one abandoned the crop in 2007/08, allocating the land they had used for opium poppy in 2006/07 to wheat in 2007/08. All blamed low opium yields and commented on the lower labour inputs required for wheat production and its increasing retail price. Yet despite these complaints, three of those interviewed in the district of Dawlat Yar reported that they would persist with opium poppy cultivation in 2007/08. The amount of land allocated to other crops such as kalool, alfalfa and potato remained unchanged.

In the district of Chaghcharan there were similar complaints regarding the yield of opium poppy in the previous season. The result was all but one respondent claimed they would abandon opium poppy cultivation in 2007/08. Most looked to use the land that they had allocated to opium poppy in 2006/07 for wheat cultivation in the 2007/08 growing season. However, one respondent reported that he would allocate the 0.5 jerib of land used for opium poppy last year to potato in the 2007/08 growing season.

In Sharak district where respondents reported that they abandoned opium poppy in all but the most remote parts of the district in 2005/06, cultivation across each of the different categories of crops remained unchanged between the 2006/07 and 2007/08 growing seasons. The main concern amongst respondents in this district was what they saw as the worsening security situation.

	Cultivated land (Jeribs)	Wheat		Other		Poppy		Fruit	
		2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)
GHOR	15.4	83.9	86.8	10.0	10.1	3.6	0.5	2.6	2.5
Chaghcharan	13.9	85.8	89.4	9.2	9.7	4.5	0.4	0.5	0.4
Dawlat Yar	23.2	83.5	87.1	12.0	12.0	4.3	0.8	0.2	0.2
Sharak	9.0	81.1	81.1	5.6	5.6	0.0	0.0	13.3	13.3

²⁰ Mansfield, David (2006) Opium poppy cultivation in the provinces of Nangarhar and Ghor' A report for AREU's Applied Thematic Research into Water Management, Livestock and the Opium Economy. AREU, Kabul. December.

4. RESPONDING TO GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS

Key Findings

- *The vast majority of farmers are aware that opium poppy is 'illegal' and that it is forbidden under Islamic law. In the northern, eastern and central regions those interviewed were of the view that the local authorities had the capacity to enforce a ban on opium poppy if they chose to.*
- *Given that farmers in the south projected marginal increases in the amount of land allocated to opium poppy when interviewed in December 2007, it would seem that counter narcotics messages have had little effect in the southern provinces. In fact, the overwhelming view there was that the authorities made statements regarding the prohibition of opium poppy cultivation each year but did not have the capacity or, it was claimed by some, the interest to enforce a ban. The picture painted in the south was one in which officials were either directly involved in the cultivation and trade of opium or at least complicit through their imposition of bribes on both those transporting opium and those that wished to avoid the eradication of their crop.*
- *The village shura and its members have been the primary source of information on the local authorities' position on opium poppy cultivation in areas where a ban on opium poppy has been implemented most effectively in the 2007/08 growing season, most notably Balkh, Badakhshan, Laghman and Nangarhar.*
- *In Nangarhar the Governor has delivered a particularly effective campaign aimed at reducing opium poppy cultivation. He has achieved this through his active involvement in the campaign including personal visits to many of the key districts and a willingness to act against the opium crop early in the planting season. The arrest and incarceration of a number of farmers in some of the more remote districts were critical to deterring cultivation across the province - as was the compliance of a number of key elders from these districts. However, by conflating the counter narcotics campaign with efforts to deter the activities of Anti Government Elements and making promises of development assistance in return for the abandonment of opium poppy, the local authorities have helped create the impression that the international presence in Nangarhar is primarily aimed at delivering reductions in opium poppy cultivation. By April 2008 this was leading to increasing levels of resentment amongst the rural population.*
- *The general consensus continues to be that eradication is targeted at those who have land nearer the district centre or the main roads. Those who had links with local officials or were 'powerful' and had the means to pay bribes are seen as the least likely to have their crop destroyed. In the 2006/07 growing season payments to avoid eradication were common in both Helmand and Kandahar in the southern provinces, as well as in Nangarhar in the eastern region.*
- *Many of those that experienced eradication last year report that they have abandoned opium poppy cultivation this season. However, historical data suggests that eradication typically does not deter cultivation over a number of seasons. Moreover, almost all of those who have abandoned opium poppy this year after losing their crop to the eradication campaign in 2007 have simply replaced the land with wheat in 2007/08. Experience has shown that in Afghanistan simply substituting opium poppy for wheat has not proven a sustainable shift from opium production.*

The Government of Afghanistan has a National Drugs Control Strategy that outlines key areas of work that it believes will affect the cultivation, trafficking and consumption of opiates in Afghanistan. Efforts to reduce levels of cultivation include the provision of development assistance to encourage rural households to pursue other livelihood options, the physical destruction of the crop on the ground as well as threats of eradication, and information operations aimed at dissuading farmers from planting the crop in the first place. This section explores these areas of work and the influence they have had on levels of opium poppy cultivation in the 2007/08 growing season.

4.1 Counter Narcotics Message: Coverage and Impact

Four-fifths of those interviewed were aware that the local authorities had made statements banning opium poppy cultivation in the 2007/08 growing season. Those respondents that claimed they were unaware of any efforts by the local authorities to disseminate the message that opium poppy cultivation is illegal this year were concentrated in the districts of Faizabad and Keshem in Badakhshan, Charbolak in Balkh, and Sharak and Dawlat Yar in Ghor.

Those who reported that they had heard the authorities proclaim a ban on opium poppy cultivation this growing season had been made aware of it through a number of different information sources, including mullahs (43%) radio (42%), the village shura (25%), neighbours (21%), elders (3%), and television (1%). There are a few discernable trends in the different information sources by which respondents became aware of the local authorities position on opium poppy cultivation in the 2007/08 growing season. The most obvious is that of the four respondents who reported that their source of information on the opium ban was from the television - all were located in Baghlan province. The other notable trend is the role of the village shura and its members in disseminating information on the ban on opium poppy cultivation this year. This seems to be quite regionalised, featuring most prominently in the provinces of Balkh, Badakhshan, Laghman and Nangarhar where bans have been enforced most effectively.

For example, all of those interviewed in Nangarhar were aware that the local authorities banned opium poppy cultivation in the current growing season, and 50% of them heard this message directly from the village shura or an elder. This contrasts markedly with the province of Helmand, where all were aware of the local authorities' position on opium poppy but none had had heard it from the local shura, instead citing radio and mullahs as their primary source of information. This was reflected across the southern provinces, where only one respondent out of 137 (located in Dand district in Kandahar province) reported that the local shura or its members was their source of information on the local authorities' opposition to opium poppy cultivation in 2007/08.

As the source of information on the authorities' position on opium poppy cultivation differed by region, so did responses. For example, in the provinces of Farah, Kandahar and Helmand there was the resounding view that the government was not in a position to ban opium poppy cultivation. In fact only three of those interviewed in the southern provinces believed it was possible for the government to implement a ban at all: two of which were in the district of Dand in Kandahar and the other in the

district of Arghandab in the same province.²¹

As was the case last year, the failure of the local authorities to deliver these messages beyond the provincial and district centres, the pervasive level of corruption, and the overall security situation raised suspicions that the statements prohibiting opium poppy were largely unenforceable.²² In fact, the overwhelming view in the southern provinces was that the authorities made statements regarding the prohibition of opium poppy cultivation each year but did not have the capacity or, it was claimed by some, the interest to enforce a ban. The picture painted in the south is one in which officials were either directly involved in the cultivation and trade of opium or at least complicit through their imposition of bribes on both those transporting opium and those that wished to avoid eradication of their crop.

At the time of fieldwork 60% of those interviewed in the provinces of Farah, Kandahar and Helmand reported that they had already planted opium; 79% in total intended to plant the crop—of which 27% claimed they would increase the amount of land they allocated to the crop compared to 2006/07 and only 3% reported they would plant less. There is therefore certainly evidence to suggest that the messages regarding the ban on opium poppy had little resonance. This is also despite the fact that respondents in the province of Kandahar were aware that the Governor had announced that those cultivating opium poppy were liable to imprisonment, and had in fact arrested a number of farmers in the districts of Arghandab and Dand.²³

Perhaps surprisingly, the majority of respondents in all the other provinces covered by the Study believed that the government was in a position to implement a ban on opium poppy. The only exception to this was the district of Anderab in Baghlan province, where even those who reported that they would not cultivate opium poppy this season believed that the government could not impose a ban.²⁴

However, despite this perception of the government's capacity to impose its will in some provinces, respondents in some areas were rather disparaging about the local authorities' efforts. For example, in Ghor respondents reported that they were aware of the ban on opium poppy cultivation due to national messages broadcast on the radio.

²¹ The government cannot come to our areas. The government cannot help us, it can't implement projects it can't bring security. In the days of the Taliban if you put a 100 PR note on a road no one can take it. Now people steal in the daytime'. Respondent in Dand, Kandahar.

²² 'The fact that counter-narcotics messages were disseminated in many districts indirectly, through a process of calling elders and villagers to the provincial and district centres and requesting them to tell farmers not to plant, rather than district woliswal travelling to the villages themselves was seen as symbolic of the weakness of local government. In the districts of Panjwai and Maiwand (Kandahar province), Nawa Barakzai and parts of Nad e Ali and Grishk (Helmand) and Bala Bulok and parts of Pusht Rud (Farah) there was a general sense that the local authorities: *'cannot come here and destroy our poppy'*. Others commented on the use of elders to disseminate counter-narcotics messages, suggesting their agreement to support the ban was only superficial: *'the elders agree [that poppy should be banned] until they have left the city'*. Ibid 2006. Page 31.

²³ Prison sentences in Kandahar were reported to be different from those in Nangarhar with any one cultivating more than one jerib of opium poppy getting 6-12 months and those growing more than one jerib getting one month for each biswa.

²⁴ At the time of fieldwork numerous men with weapons could be seen walking round the district bazaar.

There was, however, little enthusiasm for opium poppy cultivation in Ghor in the 2007/08 growing season. Unrelated to the information campaign repeated crop failures over the last few years had served to deter most from planting. Indeed, one respondent in the district of Chaghcharan reported that he had cultivated four jeribs of land with opium poppy and got 5 kg of opium last year. Yields of 1-3 kg per jerib were not unknown (see Box 3). These low yields were compounded by falling prices from 4,000Afs/kg in July 2006 to 3,000 Afs/kg in July 2007, and the claim that opium traders had stopped coming to the area to buy the crop. Despite this, a small number of those interviewed anticipated low levels of opium poppy cultivation would persist in parts of Chaghcharan, particularly in Angaran.

Box 3:

'Last year I cultivated opium poppy. But I did not get a yield. The crop dried in the ground and did not produce anything. Now this land is without a crop. I cannot cultivate wheat as I don't have any seed. If we find a sharecropper we will cultivate wheat. I don't want to cultivate poppy as there is no benefit'.

Dawlat Yar district, Ghor.

In Balkh, the resounding view that the provincial and district authorities could impose a ban on opium poppy cultivation persisted for a second consecutive year. There was little doubt in the minds of the majority of those interviewed that the authorities' statements regarding the ban on opium poppy would be acted upon. Indeed, a number of respondents there claimed that some of the farmers arrested for growing opium poppy last year were still in prison (see Box 4). There were however, frequent complaints regarding the adverse economic effects that the prohibition of opium poppy imposed on the population. Respondents reported that fewer local wage labour opportunities and falling wage labour rates had accompanied the implementation of the ban on opium production in 2006/07. There were also reports of increasing rates of migration to Iran.

The most effective campaign aimed at reducing opium poppy in the 2007/08 growing season seems to have been implemented in the province of Nangarhar. Indeed, there was unanimity in the view that the authorities had announced their opposition to opium poppy cultivation but also in the belief that they were in a position to impose their will. Even in the district of Achin, respondents were of the view that the authorities could impose a ban in 2007/08 – in contrast to the 2004/05 growing season when cultivation fell by 96% across Nangarhar but persisted in Achin, and where those interviewed that season did not believe the government could impose its will.²⁵ In total, all of the respondents interviewed who reported that they had cultivated opium poppy in the 2006/07 growing season claimed that they had abandoned it in 2007/08.

Box 4:

'A Kandahari came to our village 10 years ago. He got land as a sharecropper. Last year he cultivated poppy. When the government came to the village to destroy the poppy they arrested the Kandahari and one other man. They were held in the Balkh district for around 2 months before being moved to the prison in Mazar. The other man was released after 4 months in prison. He bribed his way out. It cost 400,000 Afs. The Kandahari is still in prison one year later. Last winter the villagers collected 60 seer of wheat for his family. Now there is no help for them – this year we too are poor and cannot help'.

²⁵ See Mansfield (2005b). "What is Driving Opium Poppy Cultivation? The Pressure to Reduce Opium Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan in the 2004/05 Growing Season". Report for the Afghan Drugs Inter Departmental Unit, UK Government (March).

Establishing the veracity of the reports surrounding this year's counter narcotics campaign in Nangarhar is problematic. There is deep suspicion amongst those interviewed in Nangarhar and rumours of different networks of paid informants working for the 'United States', Anti Government Elements, and the security agencies of the Government of Afghanistan only add to the environment of mistrust and recriminations.

There is, however, no doubt amongst those interviewed that the local authorities, and in particular the Governor of the province, mounted a pro-active campaign against opium poppy this season. In many cases the Governor himself is reported to have visited different districts and informed the population of the ban on opium poppy. The general perception is that this campaign began prior to the planting season and coincided with the US military's efforts to establish Forward Operating Bases in the districts of Chapahar, Khogiani and Achin. There is a resounding view that the authorities' willingness and capacity to take action against the crop early in the planting season was critical to deterring cultivation across the province.

In particular, the arrest and detention²⁶ of a number of farmers from some of the more remote parts of Achin and Khogiani is believed to have been key to sending the message not only in these districts but also in the more accessible areas nearer to the Torkham road that opium poppy would not be tolerated in the 2007/08 growing season. For example, in Achin these arrests are reported to have deterred planting amongst respondents in the upper parts of the district where cultivation persisted even during the last ban on opium poppy in the province in the 2004/05 growing season.

The compliance of a number of elders, particularly from the Shinwari tribe in Achin, is also believed to have been instrumental in creating the perception that the local authorities could impose their will on the population in the 2007/08 growing season, even on local power brokers. As in the year of the Taliban prohibition (2000/01) and the ban in 2004/05, there are rumours that some of these elders received payments for their compliance with this year's campaign.²⁷ Claims that reductions in cultivation would be rewarded by increases in development assistance are also rife.

However, there is also the perception that the local authorities succeeded in conflating the counter narcotics campaign with efforts to deter the activities of Anti Government Elements, particularly in the districts of Achin and Khogiani on the Pakistan border. It is easy to see how this might have occurred given what is seen by the local population as both a significant increase in US military presence in some of the districts covered by this Study and a growing number of raids on household compounds.

²⁶ It was reported that 27 farmers from Achin were arrested and imprisoned in Jalalabad. Some of those interviewed reported that the penalty for cultivation was a fine of between 10,000 and 50,000 Afs and a sentence of three to six months in jail.

²⁷ For more detailed on the imposition of the Taliban prohibition in and the ban on opium in Nangarhar in the 2004/05 growing season and its subsequent collapse see Mansfield, David (2008) Resurgence and Reductions: Explanations for Changing Levels of Opium Poppy Cultivation in Nangarhar and Ghor in 2005-2007. A report for AREU's Applied Thematic Research into Water Management, Livestock and the Opium Economy. AREU, Kabul. May 2008.

In fact, it is claimed the establishment of checkpoints, house searches and the cordoning off of villages led to the elders from Achin complaining to the Governor. In turn the Governor is reported to have told the residents of Achin: *'You should not grow poppy. I don't have the power to protect you and your land from US forces'*. Further raids on household compounds resulting in the confiscation of opium and the arrest of local men, as well as claims (rightly or wrongly) that US forces were directly involved in delivering counter narcotics messages, compounded the perception that the purpose of the increased US military presence in these districts was primarily one of counter narcotics.²⁸

It is claimed that in late October the elders in Achin pledged to the Governor of Nangarhar not to cultivate opium poppy on the understanding that US forces would no longer have a permanent presence in the district. It is also reported that as part of this agreement the elders also agreed not to give free access through the district to Anti Government Elements travelling between Pakistan and Afghanistan.²⁹ However, it is also reported that Taliban commanders visited Achin in late October and offered their support. It is reported that their offer was declined. It is now clear that the activity of Anti Government Elements in the east has increased substantially in the last few months.

4.2 Eradication: Coverage and Impact

Eradication comprises the physical destruction of the crop in the field. In 2006/07. UNODC reported that a total of 20,734 hectares of opium poppy was destroyed, of which 17,587 ha was destroyed under the Governor Led Eradication Programme and a further 3,149 ha by the Afghanistan Eradication Force, a paramilitary unit in the Ministry of Interior.

Of those interviewed, almost two-thirds (64%) were aware of the government's eradication campaign last year. However, only 10% of those interviewed reported that their crop had actually been destroyed last year - all of whom were in the central (Ghor), northern (Baghlan, Badakhshan and Balkh) and eastern regions (both Nangarhar and Laghman. Perhaps surprisingly, none of those interviewed in the provinces of Farah, Helmand and Kandahar reported that their crop had been destroyed in 2006/07. This is despite the levels of eradication reported in the districts in which fieldwork was undertaken in 2006/07³⁰ and the fact that the majority of those interviewed in the south reported that their opium crop had been destroyed in

²⁸ Typically these raids would seem to be poorly understood by farmers who do not see themselves as opium traders and believe the intrusion into their homes dishonour the female members of their household and scare their children. The discovery of weapons during such raids and the subsequent arrest of the homeowner are similarly misunderstood given the fact that the vast majority of households will have one or more guns in their possession 'for protection'.

²⁹ Reports suggest that the agreement is that Anti Government Elements limit their presence to the mountainous part of the district and do not pass through the valleys. Personal communication April 2008.

³⁰ UNODC report that 17587 ha of opium poppy were eradicated in Afghanistan under Governor Led Eradication and a further 3,149 ha by the Afghan Eradication Force during the 2006/07 growing season. In the province of Kandahar it was reported that a total of 7,905 ha were destroyed under Governor Led Eradication of which 519 ha were in the district of Arghandab, 1,017 ha in Daman, 1084 ha in Dand, and 1,813 ha in the district of Maiwand. In Helmand province a total of 1,945 ha were reported as destroyed by GLE of which 1,511 ha were in Lashkar Gah. The AEF reported destroying a further 3,000 ha of opium poppy in Helmand but this was not verified by UNODC. See UNODC/MCN Afghanistan: Opium Survey 2007. Pages 71-77; 163-165.

previous seasons. (Almost half (49%) claimed their crop was destroyed in the 2005/06 season, 77% in the 2004/05 season and 12% in the 2003/04 growing season.)

When previous eradication campaigns are also considered, half of those interviewed for this Study report that their crop was destroyed on at least one occasion going back as far as 1998. In total 306 incidents of eradication were reported, with 9% of those interviewed reporting that their crop had been destroyed on more than one occasion. Just over a third (35%) of all these incidences of eradication were in the 2004/05 growing season, 25% in 2005/06 and 14% in 2006/07.

As in previous years, the general consensus continues to be that eradication is targeted at those who have land nearer the district centre or the main roads. Those who had links with local officials or were 'powerful' and had the means to pay bribes were seen as the least likely to have their crop destroyed. Whilst many of those interviewed held the view that it was the poor who were more likely to lose their crop, this perception was more pronounced amongst respondents in Kandahar and Helmand. In Kandahar there were also claims that tribes more closely linked with the government were less likely to lose their crop. In Ghor and Badakhshan, those who cultivated opium poppy in the rainfed areas were thought to be able to keep their crop intact. *'the Police do not go far from the road'*.

It is also alleged that those who are willing or have the capacity to pay the eradication team were less likely to have their crop eradicated than others. There were numerous reports of bribes in Kandahar, Helmand and Nangarhar. For example, in Achin district in Nangarhar, four respondents reported paying bribes to local officials so that their crop would not be destroyed. Payments of between 3,000 PR to 5,000 PR per jerib were reported. In Nangarhar, it was reported that in order to avoid the eradication of their crop, the inhabitants of one particular village had to make payments to the officials of the two districts on which the village bordered. In Nangarhar, a further twelve respondents reported that their crop escaped eradication but that they paid compensation to those in their village whose crop was destroyed.

In Helmand and Kandahar there were also reports of corruption associated with last years eradication campaign. In the district of Nad e Ali, respondents alleged that payments were made to local officials to avoid eradication. It was reported that villagers with links to local government officials were often used to negotiate these payments. In the district of Lashkar Gah one respondent reported that in return for a payment the head of the eradication team asked: *'show me where the poppy will not give a good yield'*. It was also claimed that the commander of one of the eradication forces would send colleagues to an area targeted for eradication to inform the community and negotiate some kind of payment. It was also suggested that when the eradication force arrived in the area, they would request information on those villagers who did not contribute to the payment and would target their opium poppy fields for destruction. In the district of Daman in Kandahar province, one respondent reported that a fellow villager paid 10,000 PR for his eight jeribs of opium poppy to remain intact. In Lashkar Gah there were allegations that a tax of one-quarter of a mand (4.5 kg) was levied on every jerib of opium poppy that was not destroyed.

Efforts to avoid eradication were not restricted to simply paying local officials not to destroy the crop. A common strategy cited in the eastern region was to limit the time

available for actually eradicating the crop in the field by providing food and hospitality to the eradication team. In the south it was claimed that villagers would inform local officials that the Taliban were in the area even if they were not, so as to deter eradication. It was also claimed that villagers would inform the Taliban if the eradication team came to their area. There were also stories of villagers themselves engaging in violent action such as laying mines, so as to deter eradication.

A superficial review of the data for this Study would suggest that eradication in 2006/07 proved quite effective in deterring cultivation in the 2007/08 growing season. For example, of the 43 respondents who reported that their crop was destroyed in 2006/07, 40 reported that they would reduce the amount of land they allocated to the crop in the 2007/08 growing season and 33 claimed that this year they would abandon the crop altogether. As result the amount of land allocated to the crop amongst those who had experienced eradication in 2006/07 also fell from an average of 24.5% of total land holdings to 3.3% in 2007/08.

Those who reported that they would persist with opium poppy cultivation in 2007/08 despite the destruction of the crop last year were located in the districts of Jurm in Badakhshan and Anderab in Baghlan - the same areas where almost as many respondents reported that they would abandon the crop in the 2007/08 growing season. One respondent in Anderab even reported that he would increase the amount of land dedicated to opium poppy from two jeribs in 2006/07 to four jeribs in the current growing season.

A more detailed review reveals that 90% of those who abandoned opium poppy in 2007/08 following eradication in 2006/07 have simply replaced the land that they had allocated to opium poppy last season with wheat. Those that did not increase the amount of land that they allocated to wheat planted annual food and fodder crops such as barley and alfalfa, or simply had less land to cultivate this year. Experience has shown that in Afghanistan simply substituting opium poppy for wheat has not proven to be a sustainable shift away from opium production.³¹ The majority of households do not have sufficient land to meet their annual wheat requirement even if they were to monocrop it. They need to sell agricultural goods or their labour just to generate enough cash income so as to make up the wheat deficit. Yet, 40% of those who abandoned their opium crop this year following eradication did not report any off-farm or non-farm income and those who did reported earning the equivalent of US\$ 0.44 per person per day from the employment that they could find.

The data also suggest that previous eradication campaigns have not been very effective in sustaining low levels of cultivation. Reductions appear to have been localised, suggesting that whilst eradication may have contributed other factors are at work. For example, of those who report that their crop was destroyed in 2004/05 (n110), in 2005/06 (n77) and on more than one occasion (n59) 67% 66% and 61%, respectively, claim that they will cultivate opium poppy in 2007/08. Those who are not cultivating opium poppy in 2007/08 following eradication in each of these years are located in the districts of Faizabad, Jurm and Keshem in Badakhshan, Tala Wa Barfak, Pul e Khumri and Anderab in Baghlan, Chemtal, and Charbolak in the

³¹ Mansfield, David (2008) Resurgence and Reductions: Explanations for Changing Levels of Opium Poppy Cultivation in Nangarhar and Ghor in 2005-2007. A report for AREU's Applied Thematic Research into Water Management, Livestock and the Opium Economy. AREU, Kabul. May 2008

province of Balkh, Alingar and Mehterlam in Laghman, Dawlat Yar in the province of Ghor and Shinwar, Achin, Khogiani, and Chapahar in Nangarhar.

There are only a few isolated example of respondents in the southern provinces - four of them in the district of Lashkar Gah, one in Farah district and one in the district of Arghandab in Kandahar - who report that their crop was destroyed during 2004/05, 2005/06 or on more than one occasion and are not cultivating opium poppy in the current growing season. The pattern amongst these respondents is the low density of household members per unit of agricultural land (around one person per jerib), access to off and non farm income (earning between 3,000 and 8,000Afs per month), a high proportion of agricultural land allocated to horticultural crops (60-80%), a relatively low incidence and levels of accumulated debt (only two with debts ranging from US \$300 – US\$ 800) and their proximity to the provincial centre (within 5 km).

The only exception to this is the respondent in Arghandab district who returned to opium poppy cultivation in 2005/06 despite losing his crop the previous season. This respondent subsequently abandoned opium poppy in 2006/07 in favour of vegetable production despite the fact that he had not lost his crop to eradication in the previous year. Then there was a shift to extensive wheat cultivation in 2007/08, occupying 90% of cultivable land.

Even those respondents who report that their opium crop has never been eradicated (n 234), as well as those that did not have their crop destroyed in 2006/07 (n 197) show marginal increases in wheat cultivation in the 2007/08 growing season, as well as either stable or marginal decreases in levels of opium poppy cultivation this season, consistent with a more general shift to wheat across the country

Table 10: Eradication and subsequent proportion of household land allocated to different crops.

	Wheat		Vegetables		Poppy		Fruit		Proportion with accumulated debts (%)	Average debt amongst those with outstanding loans (US \$)
	2006/07 (%)	200708 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)	2006/07 (%)	2007/08 (%)		
All	54.0	60.4	24.6	22.6	17.8	13.3	3.6	3.7	34.8	1154.2
Experienced eradication	46.7	52.6	24.1	21.8	24.6	20.9	4.6	4.6	36.2	1289
Eradicated more than once	38.5	44.7	24.4	21.8	32.9	28.9	4.2	4.5	33.9	923
Crop eradicated in 2006/07	56.4	79.4	18.3	16.5	24.5	3.3	0.7	0.7	44.2	1236.8
No eradication in 2006/07	44.8	47.5	25.2	22.8	24.6	24.3	5.4	5.4	34.5	1303.5
Never eradicated	62.6	69.7	25.3	23.7	9.7	4.1	2.4	2.5	33.4	1003.9

Box 5: Abandoning Opium Poppy in the South

A respondent in **Farah** had 15 jeribs of cultivable land and employed others to work on it. In 2007/08 he intended to cultivate exactly as he had the previous year: seven jeribs of wheat, one jerib of alfalfa, two jeribs of sesame, two jeribs of barley and three jeribs of spinach. There were 14 members in his family of which five worked full time. He owned a butchers shop in the local bazaar earning an estimated 300 Afs per day. He had no outstanding debts. He had grown opium poppy in 2005 and 2006 and it had been eradicated both years. He had not cultivated opium poppy since the 2005/06 growing season.

A respondent in the district of **Lashkar Gah** owned 10 jeribs of land in **Bust** only 5 km from the provincial centre. There were six people in his household, three adults of which two worked full time: one on the farm the other as a wage labourer earning 150 Afs per day for an estimated 11 months of the year. This respondent had also chosen to cultivate exactly as he had done in the 2006/07 growing season, an orchard of four jeribs, one jerib of cucumber, one jerib of tomato, one jerib of onion, one jerib of alfalfa and two jeribs of wheat. He had grown opium poppy in 2005 and 2006 and it had been eradicated both years. He had not cultivated opium poppy since the 2005/06 growing season.

Another respondent in **Bust** owned six jeribs of land. In the 2006/07 growing season he cultivated two jeribs of wheat, one jerib of onion, one half of a jerib of tomato, one half of a jerib of alfalfa, and two jeribs of spinach. He reported that he would be cultivating the same crops in the coming season in 2007/08 and had already planted the spinach. There were seven people in his household – two were working one full time on the farm the other earning a daily wage in the provincial centre and paid 100-150 Afs per day. They had no outstanding loans. He had cultivated opium poppy in the 2004/05 growing season and it had been eradicated. He had not grown opium poppy since 2005.

The last respondent in **Bust** had 17 jeribs of land and 14 family members with two working full time. He did not work his own land but employed others to do it. He was a shopkeeper in Lashkar Gah. His son helped him. He earned almost 8,000 Afs per month. In 2006/07 they had cultivated four jeribs of wheat, four jeribs of orchards, two jeribs of cucumber, three jeribs of watermelon, two jeribs of alfalfa and two jeribs of okra. This year he intended to plant the same amount of land with wheat, orchards, alfalfa and okra but plant one less jerib of land with cucumber and grow four jeribs of watermelon instead. He had an outstanding loan of 40,000 Afs dating back to 2005 when his son got married. He had not cultivated opium poppy since the 2004/05 growing season when his crop was eradicated.

A respondent in **Sarkar**, only 3 km from the provincial centre of Lashkar Gah, sharecropped 12 jeribs of land. There were seven in his household two of who worked on the farm full time. They reported that they had had no off-farm or non-farm income. In 2006/07 they had cultivated four jeribs of wheat, one jerib of cucumber, two jeribs of cotton, one jerib of alfalfa, one jerib of spinach and three jeribs of opium poppy. In 2007/08 the respondent intended to abandon opium poppy and cultivate one jerib of tomato, one jerib of onion and one jerib of spinach instead. The respondent had an accumulated debt of 15,000 Afs that he blamed on his household expenditure exceeding his income. He had experienced eradication in the 2004/05 growing season but had cultivated opium poppy the following year. He claimed to have expanded the amount of land that he had allocated to tomato and onion this year due to the good yield and price he had received in 2007.

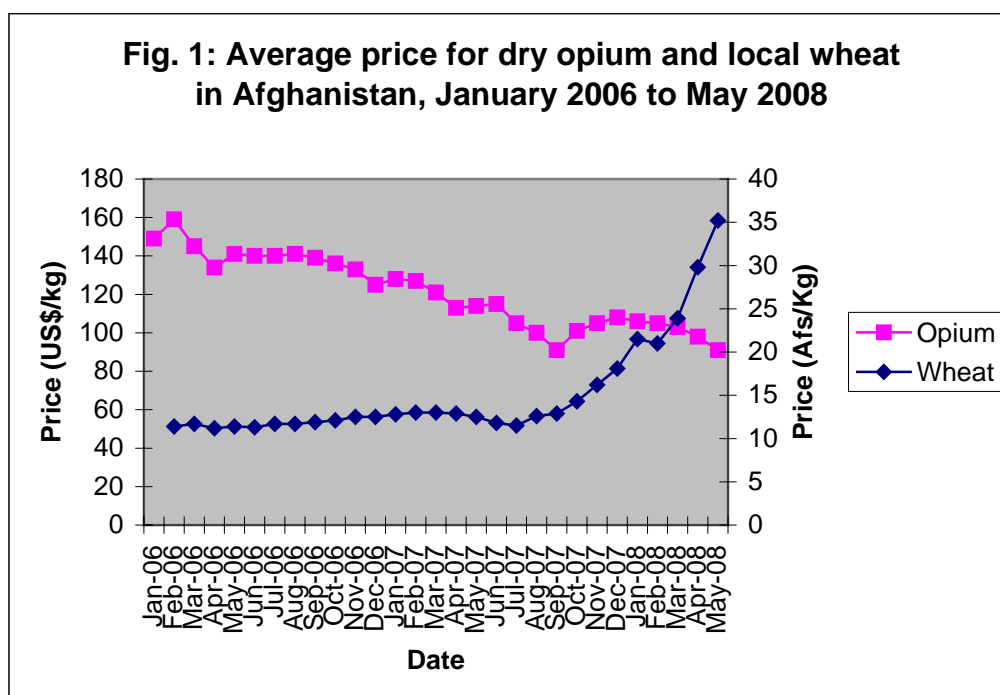
A respondent in Jaza, in **Arghandab** district some 22 km from the provincial centre of Kandahar reported that he owned five jeribs of land and seven family members, one of whom working full time on the farm the other worked as a shopkeeper in the district centre. They earned round 3000 Afs a month from the shop. On the farm they had cultivated three jeribs of wheat, one half of a jerib of tomato, one half of a jerib of cucumber, one half of a jerib of onion, and one half of a jerib of okra in 2005/06. In 2007/06 they intended to cultivate only one half of a jerib of onion and allocate the other four and a half jeribs of land to wheat, complaining that they had insufficient wheat to meet the family's requirements last year and that both tomato and cucumber prices had been low. They had an outstanding debt of 8,000 Afs that was attributed to illness within the family. They had cultivated

5. RESPONDING TO FOOD INSECURITY: A PREFERENCE FOR WHEAT?

Key Findings

- *There is evidence of a movement into wheat production in the 2007/08 growing season. Whilst this is at its most pronounced amongst those who had abandoned or reduced the level of opium poppy cultivation in 2007/08, with many of them entirely substituting wheat for opium poppy, there were also signs of an increase in wheat cultivation amongst those who had not cultivated opium poppy at all. Amongst these farmers, increases in wheat cultivation occurred at the expense of land that had been allocated to annual horticultural crops last year. This trend occurred in a range of districts across the country including those in close proximity to the provincial centre.*
- *Research has shown that where households are concerned that they will not be able to purchase wheat on the open market at a reasonable price, they have favoured wheat cultivation over opium poppy. This is not necessarily to generate a surplus for sale but rather to ensure a minimum amount of wheat that the household can consume should there be a shortfall in domestic production and imports from neighbouring countries. This pursuit of food security may well be contributing to reductions in levels of opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan in the 2007/08 growing season.*
- *At the time fieldwork was completed in the southern provinces, farmers anticipated that they would marginally increase the amount of land they would allocate to opium poppy compared to 2006/07. However, fieldwork was completed both before the 2007/08 planting season was complete and prior to the dramatic increases in wheat prices that occurred over the winter. There is a real potential that farmers in the south diverged from their projected levels of opium poppy cultivation and instead allocated some of the land that they had reserved for poppy to wheat. Indeed, there is anecdotal evidence of farmers changing their decision regarding what to plant as late as January/ February, and ploughing up the land they had planted with opium poppy this season, using it to plant improved varieties of wheat.*
- *The majority of those interviewed were not in a position to produce a marketable surplus of wheat even if they monocropped it. This was at its most extreme in Nangarhar and Laghman, reflecting the high population densities per unit of agricultural land in these two provinces. Amongst this group the dramatic increase in wheat prices has simply led to exponential increases in the cost of living and must raise significant questions about the sustainability of the current low level of opium poppy cultivation in Nangarhar.*
- *Larger landholdings in the northern region mean that a greater proportion of those interviewed have the potential to meet their own wheat requirements. However, a sizeable proportion of household land is rainfed and therefore vulnerable to insufficient snowfall, and/or spring and summer rains as is proving to be the case in the current 2008 season. This may suggest that as long as there is sufficient precipitation, many of those interviewed in the provinces of Badakhshan and Balkh have a greater capacity to meet their wheat food requirements when a ban is imposed on opium than is currently the case for respondents in Nangarhar.*
- *By growing opium poppy, farmers can gain preferential access to land, credit and off farm income. In some of the drier karez irrigated areas, opium production has provided the means to sink and subsequently finance the recurrent costs of tube wells, without which there would be very little agricultural production at all. Whilst this year given the current retail price of wheat, substituting some land with wheat may secure greater food security, abandoning opium poppy entirely would not be an option.*

There is considerable discussion in the media and amongst policy makers about the impact of the increase in wheat prices on the population of Afghanistan. Some of it speculates about the potential for wheat as a substitute to opium poppy cultivation in the next growing season, i.e. in 2008/09.³² The dramatic increase in wheat prices over the last twelve months,³³ and the crop's low labour requirements in comparison to opium poppy make the net returns on the crop more attractive than has been the case for some time. The continuing fall in the price of opium (see Figure 1) and the significant increases in the daily wage labour rates obtained during the opium harvest season in both the southern and eastern region in April/May 2008 reduced the net returns on opium production. However, this is not the first time that the net returns on wheat have been higher than that for opium poppy.³⁴



The implication of this comparison is that farmers will respond to the changed price signals and increase the level of wheat cultivation. Yet the relationship between the prices of agricultural commodities and the level of cultivation in Afghanistan is far from simple. For example, during the drought in the late 1990s, research indicated that households determined how much land to allocate to wheat based on estimates of water availability rather than the market price.³⁵ Moreover, the wheat crop is not only a source of grain for consumption or sale - it also produces straw that is used as

³² The Guardian 'Afghans swap poppies for wheat as food costs soar' by Pia Heikkila, May 13 2008. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/may/13/afghanistan>

³³ It should be noted that the prices cited here are for local wheat. Imported wheat from Pakistan, typically favoured by the Afghan population, reaches as high as US\$ 0.50 in April 2008.

³⁴ For instance, in 1994, 1997 and 1999, wheat generated higher returns than opium poppy in a number of districts in the southern region of Afghanistan. See UNDCP, Afghanistan: Assessment Strategy and Programming Mission to Afghanistan, May-July 1995; and UNDCP, Afghanistan Annual Opium Poppy Survey 1997, (Islamabad, UNDCP, p. 11). Cited in Mansfield, David 2002

³⁵ See Andy Hale Afghanistan Food Aid Impact Assessment, Chemonics International Inc., December 2002.

fodder for livestock which in turn produces fertiliser for the production of crops, as well as meat and dairy products for the household and/or market. As such, the wheat crop is part of a wider agricultural system and cannot be judged purely based on the financial returns of wheat itself.³⁶

This section explores the shift into wheat production in the 2007/08 growing season, and in particular the potential for projected levels of wheat cultivation in the southern provinces to change. It also looks at the economic implications of not maintaining a level of wheat cultivation that is commensurate with household wheat requirements.

5.1 Evidence of a shift?

What becomes increasingly apparent when reviewing the changes in cropping patterns across the different provinces covered by the Study is the early evidence of a movement into wheat production in the 2007/08 growing season. This movement is at its most pronounced amongst those interviewed who have abandoned or reduced the level of opium poppy cultivation this year. In fact, almost 90% of those who have reduced opium poppy cultivation were found to have increased the amount of land they allocated to wheat this year. Just over 90% of these respondents simply substituted all of the land that they had cultivated with opium poppy last year with wheat in 2007/08.

However, an increase in wheat cultivation has not only occurred in areas in which the local authorities have imposed a ban on opium poppy cultivation, such as many of the districts in the province of Nangarhar, the districts of Anderab and Tala Wa Barfak in Baghlan or Alishang in Laghman. In fact, 40% of those who increased the amount of land they allocated to wheat this year had not reduced the amount of land they allocated to opium poppy - indeed only five of these respondents cultivated opium poppy at all. Amongst these respondents increases in wheat cultivation occurred at the expense of land that had been allocated to annual horticultural crops last year. This trend occurred in a range of districts across the country such as Surkhrud in Nangarhar, Faizabad, Jurm and Keshem in Badakhshan and even the districts of Lashkar Gah in Helmand and Farah district in Farah province.

The only exception to either a fairly major increase in the level of wheat cultivation as reported by respondents in Nangarhar and parts of Badakhshan, or marginal increases on pre-existing high levels of cultivation, as in Balkh and Ghor, is in the southern provinces of Helmand, Kandahar and Farah. In these three provinces respondents reported that opium poppy cultivation would experience marginal increases in the 2007/08 season and that wheat would remain the minor crop.

However, it has to be remembered that at the time of fieldwork the winter planting season was not yet complete. Respondents reported that on average 40% of the total amount of land that they would cultivate during the 2007/08 growing season was already planted. In some areas the impact of this is more significant than in others. For example, in the higher-altitude areas such as Ghor and Badakhshan where the majority of the land is planted in late January/early February, only 14% and 19%,

³⁶ *'Any attempt, for instance to analyse the wheat crop as activity conducive only to the production of wheat grain would be deeply flawed'* Hector Maletta (July 2004) *'The Grain and the Chaff: Crop residues and the cost of production of wheat in Afghanistan in a framing system perspective'* Unpublished Paper. Page 2.

respectively, of the land to be cultivated this winter season was planted at the time of fieldwork.

Yet, in these areas respondents already reported the likelihood of particularly high levels of wheat cultivation for the 2007/08 growing season; consequently any further increases due to rising wheat prices would most likely be rather marginal. The northern and central regions had already seen significant rises in the retail price of wheat in mid and late 2007. Any impact price increases would have on decisions as to what crops would be grown in the 2007/08 season were already likely to have materialised at the time of the fieldwork. In fact, 40% of those who reported that they would allocate more land to wheat in 2007/08 compared with the 2006/07 growing season cited the high price of wheat as a stimulus. All but ten of these were in the central and northern provinces, and two-thirds of those interviewed in the provinces of Ghor, Baghlan, Badakhshan and Balkh, who reported that they would increase the amount of land they allocated to wheat this year, cited the high price of wheat as the reason. Indeed, at the time of fieldwork one kilogramme (kg) of local wheat had already reached 20 Afs in Badakhshan and 18.5 Afs in Balkh compared to around 12 Afs/kg in December 2006.

It is therefore more likely that the dramatic increases in the price of wheat that really began to take hold in November 2007 would lead to bias in the responses of those interviewed in the southern provinces more than in the central and northern regions. The start of the rapid increase in wheat prices was slowly beginning to appear in the eastern region at the time of fieldwork with a number of respondents (n9) commenting on the high price of wheat as justification for increasing levels of cultivation in the 2007/08 growing season. There was only one respondent across the three southern provinces that cited increasing wheat prices as a reason for increasing levels of wheat cultivation.

By the time fieldwork was completed in the province of Helmand, those interviewed reported that 57% of the land that was to be cultivated during the winter season of 2007/08 had already been planted at the time of interview. Given that opium poppy is typically planted prior to wheat, this area constituted 63% of the area respondents reported that they would cultivate with opium poppy in 2007/08 and only 40% of the land they claimed they would allocate to wheat production.

The likelihood of what might be considered a 'last minute' change in cropping decisions amongst respondents in the southern provinces is hard to gauge. There are few logistical obstacles to changing the decision to plant any residual land with wheat instead of opium poppy, even as late into the planting season as the second or third week of December. The land would already be prepared, and the main constraint might be the availability of seed. There is certainly anecdotal evidence of farmers changing their decision regarding what to plant as late as January/ February 2008. For example, reports from the district of Lashkar Gah in the province of Helmand³⁷ and Maiwand in Kandahar province³⁸ suggest that there were a number of farmers who ploughed up the land they had planted with opium poppy this season and used it to plant improved varieties of wheat.

³⁷ Personal communication with Chemonics staff in Lashkar Gah, Helmand, February 2008

³⁸ Personal communication with GoA staff from Maiwand in Kandahar city, April 2008.

The reasons for such behaviour are not as clear as they are dramatic. Some might see this behaviour as reflecting deepening concerns over rising wheat prices and that a shift from opium to wheat is a rational strategy for ensuring a degree of self-sufficiency in food. Others might interpret the destruction of opium poppy and the planting of wheat as a logical response to a change in the net returns on different crops and therefore part of an overall strategy of profit maximisation. Of course both could well be true, but more needs to be known about the assets of the household, in particular the amount of land they cultivate, whether they own lease, or sharecrop that land, as well as how many people the product from the land supports, before a judgement can be reached.

5.2 Potential market surplus

Maletta (2006) estimates that household wheat requirements in Afghanistan are the equivalent of around 200 kg per person per year. He classifies households producing between 150 and 250 kg of cereals per capita as 'near self sufficiency'; those producing less than 150 kg per capita as 'below self sufficiency' and those producing above 250 kg per capita output as 'surplus households - 'comfortably above self sufficiency in cereals and thus having a marketable cereal surplus'³⁹

Using an average yield of 1.4 metric tonnes per hectare⁴⁰ and calculating the division of the total yield from sharecropped land on the basis of a 1:1 split in the north, east and central regions and a 3:1 (with the sharecropper receiving the smaller share) split in the south, the data suggest that 36.9% of those interviewed for this Study could be categorised as 'below self sufficiency', 19.6% as 'near self sufficient', and 43.5% as 'surplus households'. When the bias introduced by the concentration of fieldwork in the more accessible areas of the southern province is considered, these figures are broadly in line with Maletta's sample where 46% of farmers were found to be 'below self sufficiency', 15% 'near self sufficiency' and 39% produced a marketable surplus.

The potential for the southern region to introduce bias becomes even more apparent when the data are disaggregated by province. Obviously those provinces where respondents had, on average, larger landholdings have a greater proportion of households with the potential to generate a marketable surplus of wheat. However, in Balkh, Badakhshan and Ghor much of this land is rainfed and therefore vulnerable to crop failure as has proved to be the case in much of the northern grain belt this season. The high proportion of respondents with a marketable surplus in the southern provinces reflects the bias that insecurity in these provinces has introduced, limiting fieldwork to the more accessible canal or river irrigated areas near the provincial centre. Inclusion of the more remote karez irrigated areas, as for instance in the districts of Musa Qala, Nawzad, Kajaki and Sangin for instance, where landholdings are considerably smaller, even within the districts covered, would lead to quite different results.

³⁹ See Hector Maletta. 'Cereal self sufficiency in Afghanistan farms', April 2006 page 2.

⁴⁰ USAID report that: 'In the past eight years, overall wheat yields have ranged from 0.9 to 1.9 mt per hectare' in 'Pakistan Wheat Subsector and Afghan Food Security' A special report by the Famine early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET). May 2007. Page 12.

Table 11: Percentage of households with a marketable surplus of wheat if wheat were monocropped.

	'Below Self Sufficient' (%)	'Near Self Sufficient' (%)	'Surplus Households' (%)
ALL	36.90	19.6	43.5
BADAKHSHAN	9.1	29.5	61.3
GHOR	25.6	16.3	58.1
BAGHLAN	33.9	28.8	37.3
HELMAND	17.0	10.7	72.2
FARAH	36.63	13.3	50.0
KANDAHAR	29.5	19.6	50.8
NANGARHAR	71.8	21.1	7.0
BALKH	13.5	16.9	69.5
LAGHMAN	61.7	25.0	13.3

In the provinces of Nangarhar and Laghman, around 90% of those interviewed would not be able to generate a marketable surplus even if they monocropped wheat.⁴¹ This figure reflects the high population densities per unit of agricultural land in these two provinces. Only five of the seventy-one interviewed in Nangarhar had sufficient land to produce a marketable surplus of wheat. One respondent in Surkhrud had 30 jeribs of land and only 12 family members and could therefore produce a surplus of over five metric tonnes (mt). However, the other respondents produced surpluses of between 0.5mt and 2.3 mt, with an average of 1.26 mt. In these cases the numbers of household members were particularly small, with an average of only 6 people.

Prior to the current dramatic increase in wheat prices in 2007/08, when prices were only 12 Afs/kg⁴² an average surplus of 1.26 mt would have been worth on average only US\$303, the equivalent of US\$0.13 of income per household member per day. This would be insufficient to meet the daily living costs of the household, highlighting the critical role high value horticulture, livestock and off- farm and non-farm income plays in the rural livelihoods of households with high populations densities per unit of land, such as those in the provinces of Nangarhar and Laghman.

With the dramatic increase in the retail wheat price over the last six months (up as high as 35 Afs/kg for local wheat by the beginning of May 2008) an average surplus of 1.26 mt would be worth the equivalent of US\$ 890 (or US\$ 0.41 per family member per day). However, for the 92% of respondents that could not generate a surplus, this increase in wheat prices has simply increased the cost of living. With an average wheat deficit of 1.9 mt per household, even if these households were to monocrop wheat each household would need US\$ 1,330 just to have sufficient wheat to meet their consumption requirements. The same amount of wheat would have costs around US\$ 460 in May 2007.

⁴¹ *'Of course if wheat were to be monocropped and the rules of crop rotation ignored the end result would be a rapid decline in yields, an increase in pests, diseases and weed infestations. The same applies to opium. Farmers are well aware of the dangers of failing to rotate crops even if economic necessity may compel them to act differently on occasions.'* Anthony Fitzherbert, personal communication.

⁴² This has been the average wheat price for local wheat for the last four years in Jalalabad. See USAID, Famine Early Warning System Afghanistan Food Security Update March 2008. page 4.

In contrast, a greater proportion of those interviewed in Helmand have the potential to generate a marketable surplus of wheat were they to monocrop it. Moreover, the surplus that they could generate would be larger than in Nangarhar at an average of 3 mt – worth the equivalent of around US\$ 2,100 at 35 Afs/Kg (or US\$ 0.67 per household member per day) and US\$ 720 (US\$ 0.23 per household member per day) in May 2007.

As in Helmand, respondents in Badakhshan and Balkh also have a greater proportion of households able to generate a marketable surplus of wheat if they were to monocrop it.⁴³ This is primarily due to the amount of cultivable land they have at their disposal. Where respondents in Helmand differ from those in Badakhshan and Balkh is that in the north a sizeable proportion of household land is rainfed and therefore vulnerable to insufficient snowfall, and/or poor spring and summer rains as in the current season. This may well suggest that as long as there is sufficient precipitation, many of those interviewed in the provinces of Badakhshan and Balkh have a greater capacity to meet their wheat food requirements when a ban is imposed on opium than is currently the case for respondents in Nangarhar.

The implications of not cultivating sufficient wheat to meet household requirements becomes all the more stark when reviewing the projected level of wheat cultivation as reported by respondents in November/December 2007. In Badakhshan, Baghlan, Balkh and Ghor, the number of households projected to be able to generate a marketable surplus in years of good and timely precipitation is relatively high reflecting the fact that such a large proportion of land is allocated to wheat in these provinces.⁴⁴ The estimates for respondents in Laghman and Nangarhar once again reflect the impact small landholdings have on the capacity of a household to attain self-sufficiency. In Helmand, Kandahar and Farah, however, there is a tendency for those interviewed not to produce the marketable surplus that they have the potential to but to grow enough wheat to be 'self sufficient' or below 'self sufficiency'. Consequently, as in the eastern region wheat deficits are made up through the purchase of wheat on the open market.

Were those interviewed in Helmand to maintain the level of wheat cultivation that they projected at the time of fieldwork they would have an average wheat deficit of 1,370 kg, compared to 1,280 kg in Farah and 1,415 kg in Kandahar. Prior to the increase in retail wheat prices beginning in December 2007, buying this much wheat would have cost only US\$300-350. By April 2008, to make up this deficit would have cost in the order of US\$ 890-990.

⁴³ See Hector Maletta 2006 'Cereal Self Sufficiency in Afghanistan farms'. Unpublished paper, April 2006.

⁴⁴ Maletta estimated that after the good harvest of 2002 households in Badakhshan had on average 9.4 months of wheat self sufficiency compared to only 3.6 months for those households in the east. *Ibid*, Page 8.

Table 12: Percentage of household with a marketable surplus of wheat based on respondents projected levels of wheat cultivation in 2007/08.

	'Below Self Sufficient' (%)	'Near Self Sufficient' (%)	'Surplus Households' (%)
ALL	43.2	35.9	20.8
BADAKHSHAN	9.1	38.6	52.3
GHOR	25.6	27.9	46.5
BAGHLAN	35.6	44.0	30.3
HELMAND	72.3	27.7	0.0
FARAH	46.7	50.0	3.2
KANDAHAR	32.8	65.6	1.6
NANGARHAR	71.8	21.1	7.0
BALKH	16.9	32.2	50.8
LAGHMAN	66.7	21.7	11.6

Or to put it in another perspective, in April 2007 respondents would have needed to sell the around 3 to 3.5 kg of dry opium to purchase around 1.3 mt of wheat. Due to the dramatic increase in retail wheat prices (from 12 Afs/kg to 35 Afs/kg) during this period, as well as falling opium prices (from US\$ 100/kg to US\$ 76⁴⁵) purchasing the same weight of wheat in April 2008 would have required selling as much as 13 kg of dry opium.⁴⁶ Given that this is the potential product of around 1.6 jeribs of opium poppy, but only after considerable investments of water, fertiliser and significant amounts of labour, including hired labour, it is understandable why some respondents might have elected not to cultivate as much opium as they initially projected in early December 2007 and, like the rest of the country, increased the amount of land they allocated to wheat – a far less input intensive crop. In fact, if those interviewed in Helmand actually responded to the increase in wheat prices and, instead of cultivating opium poppy on the residual land as they had indicated, opted to plant wheat, then the proportion of cultivable land allocated to opium poppy by those interviewed would fall from an average of 51.6% to 41%. Correspondingly, the amount of land allocated to wheat would increase potentially from 18.69% to 28.6% of the cultivated land of those interviewed

Research has shown that where households are concerned that they will not be able to purchase wheat on the open market at a reasonable price, they have favoured wheat cultivation over opium poppy.⁴⁷ It is important to recognise that this is not necessarily to generate a surplus for sale but to ensure a minimum amount of wheat that the household can consume should there be a shortfall in domestic production and imports from neighbouring countries.⁴⁸ This pursuit of food security may well be

⁴⁵ UNODC/ MCN Annual Opium Price Monitoring, June 2008.

⁴⁶ This is based on average opium yields of 40kg/ha. UNODC Annual Opium Poppy Surveys 1995-2007.

⁴⁷ UNDCP Afghanistan: Assessment Strategy and Programming Mission to Afghanistan, May - July 1995.

⁴⁸ *'Most Afghan farmers do not have a marketable wheat surplus. Most are in fact net buyers of wheat (or flour). Many do not sell any straw or weeds either. Therefore many farmers do not derive any*

contributing to reductions in levels of cultivation of opium poppy in Afghanistan in the 2007/08 growing season. Whether this is sustained into 2008/09 depends not only on the trend in global wheat prices and the position of the Government of Pakistan regarding wheat exports to Afghanistan, but also on the assets of different households.

Moving some land out of opium and into wheat has some clear advantages given the current retail price of wheat. However, by growing opium poppy farmers can gain preferential access to land, credit and off farm income. In some of the karez irrigated areas of Farah, Kandahar, Helmand and Nangarhar, opium has provided either the income or access to the necessary credit to sink and subsequently finance the recurrent costs of tubewells or 'bowres' without which there would be very little agricultural production at all. As one respondent in Daman put it '*if we don't cultivate poppy we don't have enough water*'. On this basis, abandoning opium poppy entirely would not seem to be an option in many of these areas. Given the high population densities per unit of agricultural land and the low incidence of horticultural production in the districts of Chapahar, Khogiani, Shinwar and Achin, a shift to wheat is likely to prove particularly unsustainable in the province of Nangarhar.

monetary revenue from growing wheat. Hector Maletta (July 2004) 'The Grain and the Chaff: Crop residues and the cost of production of wheat in Afghanistan in a framing system perspective' Unpublished Paper. Page 4

6. RESPONDING TO CONFLICT AND CORRUPTION

Key Findings

- *Corruption is perceived to be endemic in the southern provinces. The increase in the number of checkpoints and the incidence of 'nuisance taxes' are seen as the most visible sign of corruption. However, exacting payments during the eradication campaigns and from itinerant harvesters travelling to the area, as well as demanding payments from opium traders, has helped create the impression that local officials are at best complicit in the drugs trade and at worst directly involved.*
- *The number of checkpoints and the frequency that payments are demanded in the southern region results in the cost of travelling between the village and the provincial centre increasing almost threefold – with a total cost of transportation by car of 7.8 PR/km, consisting of 2.8 PR/Km for transport and 5 PR/Km for bribes. This differs markedly from other provinces, where although the cost of transportation to the provincial centre can be higher than in the south due to the nature of the terrain, the total cost of travelling one kilometre is one third of the cost of travelling the same distance in the southern region (a total cost of 2.5 PR/Km compared to 7.8 PR/km respectively).*
- *The perception that some of the government's key power brokers in the south are involved in the opium trade, extortion of the trade by the ANP, the corruption associated with eradication, as well as the view that counter narcotics efforts (and in particular eradication) are primarily driven by western desires to reduce consumption in their own countries, all weaken the government's ability to be seen to be acting in the interests of the Afghan population*
- *Travelling by road in the south risks being stopped by thieves, the Taliban and the Afghan National Police, as well as any auxiliary forces. This has raised the economic and personal risks that individuals associate with travel. It has stymied the trade in annual horticultural crops, creating an environment in which opium poppy can thrive*

Whilst there is considerable debate in academic literature about the causal relationship between conflict, poor governance and insecurity, there is little disagreement regarding the high level of coincidence between these factors in countries such as Afghanistan. It is certainly clear that the conflict has significant impact on the wellbeing of the population in Afghanistan. It has led not only to deaths and injuries but has also limited the potential for economic growth and employment, and reduced access to economic infrastructure and social services in many parts of the country. For example, in Helmand province fourteen health posts are not open due to concerns over the safety of staff. In Kandahar, agricultural extension services are limited to only eight of the seventeen districts in the province, and even in those that do receive some support, coverage is far from comprehensive due to the prevailing security situation.

The endemic corruption that has become the most visible manifestation of poor governance also has a profound affect on the poor. It leads to scarce resources being redirected away from those in the most need to those with the most power. It raises the transaction costs of accessing goods and services in both the public and private sectors and thereby limits the consumption and investment choices of those without sufficient wealth and influence. Finally, it undermines the population's confidence in, and support for, the state institutions that in the medium to long term should be able to invest in the necessary social protection mechanisms and facilitate the economic growth that are prerequisites to lifting the population out of poverty.

Of course, much of the Afghan population has vivid experience of the adverse consequences of conflict, poor governance and poverty. Indeed, as the recent Participatory Poverty Assessment conducted in Afghanistan found:

*'While poverty tended to be portrayed in terms of a lack of material assets (particularly suitable housing, cash, land and livestock) and food insecurity (the inability to feed oneself and family) the poor also placed a great deal of emphasis on the wider experience of poverty as one of being marginalized from essential services, such as education, health, security and opportunities of employment. Powerlessness, helplessness and an inability to act or 'have an option' to improve wellbeing were also indicated by participants'*⁴⁹

This section explores the issues of corruption and conflict and how they affect household cropping decisions. In particular, it looks at the disparity between the level of corruption and insecurity experienced by those in the southern provinces where opium poppy has become highly concentrated in the last two years, compared with those in the northern, central and eastern regions where cultivation is currently so low. It highlights how in the south opium poppy maintains the role it was recognised to have in the late 1990s - that of a 'low risk crop'- but acknowledges that this is increasingly in a chronically high-risk environment

⁴⁹ Cited by Sippi Azerbaijani, Andrew Pinney and Abi Masfield in 'Poverty, Gender and Social Exclusion Analysis' in 'Understanding Afghanistan'. DFID Report (forthcoming).

6.1 Getting Goods to Market

In the provinces of Laghman and Nangarhar, the ability to move agricultural goods to the market in Kabul has been instrumental to the growth in high-value horticultural production. Traders from Kabul and Jalalabad have been found to travel to the districts around the provincial centre of Jalalabad as well as to Mehtarlam and Qarghai in Laghman to purchase goods at the farmgate. These traders have met the costs of transportation, any taxes and bribes en route to market and even paid farmers to harvest their own crop if they have paid an advance payment prior to harvest. Traders have also been found to purchase annual and perennial horticultural crops at the farmgate in other parts of the country, including parts of Badakhshan, Balkh and Baghlan.

Interviews in Helmand and Kandahar, however, suggest more limited geographical coverage by traders. In Kandahar it was claimed that only grapes and pomegranates were purchased at the farmgate, and largely limited to Arghandab and Panjwai. In Helmand and Kandahar there were no reports of traders travelling to the districts to purchase annual horticultural crops. Transportation of these goods was largely the responsibility of the farmer himself.

There was a consensus that movement in the south has become even more restricted than it was in previous years. In fact, all of those interviewed in the southern provinces of Farah, Kandahar and Helmand believe that the security situation has got worse over the last twelve months, compared to only 26% of those in the central, eastern and northern regions (64% of those interviewed in these regions believe the security situation has remained the same over the last 12 months and 8% believe it has improved).

Respondents in the south cited the incidence of mines, suicide attacks, kidnapping and the killing of both local people and commanders as evidence of growing insecurity. It was alleged that whilst the Government controlled the district centres in the provinces of Farah, Kandahar and Helmand, the Taliban controlled much of the area around them. At the time of fieldwork, the district centres of Pusht Rud in Farah and Nawa Barakzai in Helmand were reported to be under siege, and considerable military support was required to deliver supplies.

It was reported that those choosing to travel by road risk being stopped by thieves, the Taliban and the Afghan National Police. Fieldworkers for this Study were stopped by the Taliban en route to Kandahar from Kabul in the province of Zabul and on their return journey. Vehicles are stopped and searched for material that might link both drivers and passengers to the government or international community. During the time when fieldwork was undertaken in the south the Taliban were reported to block the road between Kandahar city and

Box 6:

'Haji Daoud went to Farah. When he was returning to Kandahar city his car broke down near Gereshk. To get help he stood near the main road and waited for the next car. The next car was a car from the security department it picked Sultan Mohammed up and agreed to take him to Kandahar city. Once they reached Maiwand they noticed six men in a green car on the main road. They were stopping cars and searching them. The security commander showed the men his identity card and told them that he worked for the government. They were not police but Taliban. They shot three of the security commanders men, and Sultan Mohammed'

Gereshk for two hours every two or three days.

It was reported that whilst the Taliban regularly stop and search vehicles in the south, they are not reported to extort payments from drivers. This is in contrast to the Afghanistan National Police whose behaviour is seen as predatory. Respondents believe the Afghanistan National Police typically seeks to avoid confrontation with the Taliban. An example of this cited by fieldworkers was of an incident where the Taliban had stopped, searched and subsequently set a truck alight on the Kabul to Kandahar highway in Zabul. It was reported that the ANP only came to the scene after the Taliban had left the area and that they then removed the tyres from the vehicle and transported them back to their checkpoint to sell.

6.2 The proliferation of Checkpoints

There has been increasing anecdotal evidence of growth in the number of checkpoints in the southern region demanding bribes from those wishing to transport goods or passengers between areas.⁵⁰ Clearly such 'nuisance taxes' not only have implications for the cost of transporting goods to market but also affect people's perception of the government. Fieldwork for this report attempted to gather both quantitative and qualitative data on these checkpoints, based on interviews with households in the villages covered by the fieldwork.

Whilst checkpoints exist in all of the areas covered by the fieldwork it was reported that they had increased in number in the southern provinces of Kandahar, Helmand and Farah. When asked about the number of checkpoints and whether this had changed over the last two years, it was only in Baghlan, Helmand, Kandahar and Farah where respondents reported an increase in the number of checkpoints that had to be crossed in their journey to the provincial centre.

In the provinces of Helmand and Farah, respondents in every village where fieldwork was undertaken reported an increase in the number of checkpoints over the last two years. So much so that in the south the data shows that on average there was a checkpoint every 6.8 km, compared to every 17 km for the sample as a whole and every 20.6 km for villages in the northern, eastern and central regions in which fieldwork was conducted. The surveyors travelling these routes for the purpose of fieldwork support this data. They reported that there were 14 checkpoints between Kandahar city and Gereshk; three checkpoints between Gereshk and Lashkar Gah; and four checkpoints between Lashkar Gah and the district centre of Nad e Ali.

Checkpoints are designed as a control measure to reduce the risk of Anti Government Elements entering into an area with explosives or weapons. Therefore it should be of little surprise that there are more checkpoints in the southern provinces where security is at its worst, and the increase in the number of checkpoints coincides with the period when the security situation has deteriorated. However, what appears to have accompanied the increase in the number of checkpoints has been an increasing incidence in the demands for bribes by those manning them.

⁵⁰ See Mansfield and Pain 2007 'Evidence from the Field: Understanding Changing Levels of Opium Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan. Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit Briefing Paper Series. Kabul. November 2007

Indeed, reports suggested that until two years ago requests for payments by officials at checkpoints were infrequent. Yet at the time of fieldwork, respondents in three-quarters of the villages (n26) where fieldwork was undertaken in the south reported that they had to make a payment to those manning checkpoints when they travelled from their village to the provincial centre. This compared with less than 5% of respondents in villages in the northern, eastern and central regions included in the sample. In fact there were only three villages in Balkh (two in the district of Charbolak, and one in the district of Balkh) and two further villages in Baghlan (both in Tala Wa Barfak) where respondents reported that officials manning checkpoints demanded payment.

Even in the southern region, payments are not made at every checkpoint. In the southern region the interview data suggest that on average payments were made at 46% of the checkpoints en route to the provincial centres. However, in the province of Farah the incidence of bribes was even more acute, with payments reportedly demanded at three-quarters of the checkpoints en route to the provincial centre. This compares with 48% of checkpoints in villages where fieldwork was undertaken in Helmand and 31% of villages in Kandahar⁵¹ and only 1.8% of checkpoints in areas where fieldwork was undertaken in the northern, eastern and central regions of the country.

In the southern region there was unanimity that it was the ANP that were demanding payment at checkpoints, although further enquiry suggested that some of those manning the checkpoints that were believed to be the ANP were in fact members of the auxiliary police. In the north respondents reported making payments to the ANP and the 'security department'.

According to the interview data, the number of checkpoints and the frequency that payments were demanded in the southern region resulted in the cost of travelling between the village and the provincial centre increasing almost threefold – with a total cost of transportation by car of 7.8 PR/km, consisting of 2.8 PR/Km for transport and 5 PR/Km for bribes. This differs sharply from other provinces where although the cost of transportation to the provincial centre can be higher than in the south due to the nature of the terrain - such as in the mountainous areas of Ghor (3.3 PR/Km) and Badakhshan (3.6 PR/Km) - the total cost of travelling one kilometre is one-third of the cost of travelling the same distance in the southern region (a total cost of 2.5 PR/Km compared to 7.8 PR/km respectively).

It is important to note that these costs are for passengers travelling by car and do not include commercial traffic or those transporting goods to market. Payments for a car could vary from 20-100 PR per checkpoint. However, trucks would be charged a payment of up to 1,000 PR depending on the load. Even where payments were not demanded in cash (and therefore not covered in the costs outlined here), it was reported that farmers transporting agricultural goods to market might have to pay with some of their crop.

⁵¹ The lower incidence of corruption at checkpoints in Kandahar is largely explained by the number of checkpoints in the city itself and reports that payments at these were relatively infrequent.

In fact it was reported that the payment demanded varied by location and by items transported. It was reported that the value of the items transported, how perishable they were and most importantly the links the person transporting or owning the goods had with officials (*'everything is done by negotiation'*) all affected the amount and frequency of payment. The transportation of high-value items by an individual without the appropriate political links could also result in officials at a larger number of checkpoints demanding payment. There were even reports that when faced with an opportunity to exact a high payment, officials would telephone colleagues at subsequent checkpoints to warn them of the potential income that could be earned by stopping a particular vehicle. This has resulted in a marked increase in the transaction costs of transporting goods in the southern provinces.

Table 13: Estimated costs of transport and 'nuisance taxes' in different provinces of Afghanistan.

	Transport costs (US\$/km)	Average distance between checkpoints (km)	Proportion of checkpoints charging	Total cost (US\$/km)
ALL	2.5	17.1	11.7	3.7
SOUTH	2.80	6.8	46.3	7.8
NORTH, EAST and CENTRE	2.3	20.6	1.8	2.5
LAGHMAN	2.5	4.5	0.0	2.5
BADAKHSHAN	3.6	36.4	0.0	3.6
NANGARHAR	2.4	16.1	0.0	2.4
BALKH	1.4	25.2	5.9	1.5
GHOR	3.3	37.5	0.0	3.3
BAGHLAN	2.3	20.3	1.5	2.7
HELMAND	3.1	7.7	47.5	9.1
FARAH	2.5	9.6	75.0	8.2
KANDAHAR	2.6	4.6	30.6	6.4

Indeed, even those with larger landholdings nearer the provincial centre can find themselves unable to make a profit on their produce when the costs of transportation and 'nuisance taxes' are included. A key informant reported that his neighbour had cultivated onion on part of his 50 jeribs of land in Nawa in 2006/07. After calculating the price of hiring a truck to Kandahar city, the cost of which he reported had increased due to the deteriorating security situation and the rise in the price of diesel, as well as what he estimated to be the cost of bribes for up to 14 checkpoints between Gereshk and Kandahar, he realised that he would be incur a financial loss. He subsequently harvested as much of the crop as he required for family consumption, offered his neighbours as much as they could harvest themselves, and left the rest in the ground to rot. Given these circumstances it is no surprise that opium poppy continues to prevail in the south

6.3 Facilitating the drugs trade

The increase in transaction costs is also felt by those involved in the opium economy. For example, a key informant in the opium trade in Helmand province reported that he typically tried to avoid the main roads and checkpoints and take the desert roads. However, when this has not been possible he has made arrangements with ANP officers manning the post. This has resulted in charges of between 2,000 PR and 3,000 PR per car. Where this arrangement has not been in place and the ANP have discovered opium, he reported that between one-third and one-half of the load would be confiscated by the ANP. He reported that the Taliban did not impose a charge and allowed free passage.

Box 7:

'Mohammed Khan was a policemen at a checkpoint in Anar Dara district in Farah province. One-night smugglers were transporting opium through Anar Dara in a jeep. Mohammed Khan asked the smuggler to pay 20,000 Afs as a bribe. After some discussion the smuggler refused to pay and told the police that they were important people and they could be harmful to them. The smugglers returned to their jeep took out their guns and started firing at the checkpoint. Six policemen at the checkpoint were killed. The next day the story was that it was Taliban who killed them but it was smugglers'.

Later in the season, there were also reports from key informants that the ANP were arresting itinerants' harvesters travelling to Helmand from outside the province. This seemed to be happening at checkpoints in Kishk e Nakod (Maiwand) in Gereshk and on the roads between Lashkar Gah and Garamsir, as well as between Gereshk and Musa Qala. It was claimed that itinerants were being held and only released on payment of cash by either the labourers themselves or by landowners looking for labour. There were even suggestions that those with larger land holdings were requesting ANP officials to find labour and would pay 'finders fees'. These could be 1,000-2,000 Afs for a group of itinerant harvesters. It was reported that the ANP's involvement in pre harvest 'taxing' was a new development, and that previously they had been content with taking payments from harvesters after they had finished their work.

Box 8:

Jan Mohammed was a migrant from Sari pul province. He had six jeribs of land. He wanted to cultivate three jeribs of land with opium poppy and the rest with wheat. The Taliban came to his village and told him to cultivate all of his land with opium poppy. They said they would protect him. He was told to enrol his son as a Talib and he would receive a salary of 8,000 PR per month. He did so and planted all his land with poppy in 2006/07. After two months his son was fighting in Pashmul in Zahre district. ISAF came and bombed the village killing his son and 6 others. When his father heard he was very upset. 'I am responsible for killing my son he is shaheed'. This year all of his land is with opium poppy.

Respondent Maiwand District, Kandahar

It is the unashamed nature of this kind of practice that appears to have led many of those interviewed in the south to believe that corrupt officials are more involved in the drugs trade than Anti Government Elements. Indeed, it was quite surprising that despite the reports that are so often seen in the press and in other articles amongst those interviewed for this Study the Taliban's involvement in the drugs trade itself was seen as more indirect. Key informants reported that the Taliban gained financially from the agricultural tithe, known as ushr, which was typically divided between the mullah and the Taliban with 5% going to each party. Taliban fighters were also reported to work during the harvest period. However,

the relationship between the Taliban and traders was less clear. The general perception was one in which the Taliban were not directly involved in the trade in opium or in its taxation but that they received payments from traders as a gift, known as *tohfa*, when business was doing well. Whether correct or incorrect, the overall perception in the south is that corrupt government officials are earning more money from their direct or indirect involvement in the drugs trade.

It was also reported that the Taliban saw opium as a point of particular weakness for the government. The perception that some of the government's key power brokers in the south are involved in the trade, taxation of the trade by the ANP, the corruption associated with eradication, and the view that counter narcotics efforts (and in particular eradication) are primarily driven by western desires to reduce consumption in their own countries, all weaken the government's ability to be seen to be acting in the interests of the Afghan population. As was the case last year, the fieldwork revealed various cases of the Taliban encouraging opium poppy cultivation offering 'cooperation' to those who did plant: As one respondent in Nad e Ali commented: *'The Taliban is good for us as they support poppy cultivation and can prevent crime in our area'*.

Caught between Anti Government Elements that are seen to be encouraging opium cultivation for political advantage as well as financial gain, and corrupt officials that at best are seen as complicit in the trade and at worst directly involved, is it any wonder that farmers continue to cultivate opium poppy so extensively in the southern provinces, even in areas near the provincial centres? Moreover, in an environment where transporting goods to market is not only costly but dangerous, is it not the lower risk option for farmers to cultivate a crop that attracts traders to their farmgate?⁵² Given the prevailing levels of insecurity in the south, opium poppy increasingly looks like it will continue to be a rational choice for many farmers.

7. CONCLUSION

In rural Afghanistan households need to manage risk and uncertainty. As we have seen in the 2007/08 growing season, Afghanistan is a country of climatic extremes. A particularly cold winter that led to the death of an estimated 650 people and a loss of 190,000 livestock⁵³ has been followed by the failure of spring rains across much of the country. It is anticipated that the rainfed wheat crop located primarily in the northern and central regions will fare particularly badly, but there will also be lower wheat yields in the irrigated areas in the rest of the country.⁵⁴ All this is on top of the exponential rise in the retail price of wheat that the country has already experienced since December 2007 due to the rise in global wheat prices and the Government of Pakistan's ban on commercial wheat exports to Afghanistan. So much so that the

⁵² See Kate Clark 'Farmers caught in the poppy trade' BBC News, 5 July 2008.

⁵³ Figures derived by the Afghanistan National Disasters Management Authority (ANDMA). See IRIN 'AFGHANISTAN: Government raps emergency response commission as winter death toll rises'. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=76600>

⁵⁴ USAID/ FEWS MET. Afghanistan Food Security Update March 2008. page 2.

Government of Afghanistan now estimate that '3.5 million people are seriously food insecure' and need immediate assistance.⁵⁵

The prior levels of food insecurity, low nutritional status, high rates of morbidity and mortality rates, as well as weak social protection systems compound the impact of these particular shocks. Conflict over land, water and political power are still a fact of life for most rural communities. The wider political and military conflict both within Afghanistan and increasingly across the border in Pakistan has led to casualties, the displacement of people, and constrained the movement of goods and services.

It is in this environment that rural households need to consider how best to allocate their resources so that they can maximise their welfare whilst managing the risk and uncertainty that is so prevalent in rural Afghanistan. There are clearly trade offs that need to be made given the complex and diversified nature of rural livelihoods in Afghanistan. For example, the decision to cultivate opium poppy impacts both on the amount of land a household can allocate to other crops and, as opium poppy is a very labour-intensive crop, the amount of labour available for on-farm, off-farm and non-farm income opportunities. An increase in the amount of land allocated to opium poppy results in less land for food and fodder crops for consumption as well as an increasing reliance on the market for purchasing any deficit in these crops that may result.

More extensive opium poppy cultivation will also increase the demands on household labour, thereby reducing both the ability of family members to take advantage of wage labour opportunities and the time spent on other activities. Depending on the extent of cultivation, an increase in opium poppy cultivation will often result in the need to hire labour during the weeding and harvest season. Raising the funds to pay for this relatively costly labour input prior to the sale of the final crop can also have wider implications for the allocation of household resources and can therefore impact on cropping decisions.

Experience has shown that opium poppy cultivation has allowed some households to increase their incomes and acquire assets. For the majority, however it has proven to be a low-risk crop in a high-risk environment, providing access to on farm and off farm income as well as credit and land. It produces a high-value, low-weight commodity that is not perishable and that has a ready supply of buyers who have proven willing to travel to the farmgate to purchase it. However, an overemphasis on opium poppy cultivation is not without risk for farmers. Disease, severe climatic conditions or eradication can result in crop failure. Market instability can be caused by over production, or by disruption of the various networks responsible for buying the opium and transporting it out of the country. Allocating too much land to opium and producing insufficient food crops for the household can leave farmers vulnerable to increases in food prices and market collapse.

Research has shown that when households are concerned that they will not be able to afford wheat on the open market, they have favoured wheat cultivation over that of opium poppy. This is not necessarily to generate a surplus that they can sell as this is

⁵⁵ IRIN 'AFGHANISTAN: Over 3.5 million at' high risk' of food insecurity – ministry'
<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=78715>

not an option for the majority of Afghan farmers, but rather to ensure production of a more adequate amount of wheat that the household can consume. In the context of fragmented markets and limited off-farm and non-farm income opportunities, even a high farmgate price for opium does not see households shift dramatically from wheat to opium poppy cultivation. The imperative during times of crisis tends to be food security and not to maximise economic returns on land.

Concerns over food security due to the rising price of wheat are heightened by the growing problems associated with moving goods and services to markets for sale. In particular the opportunity to sell agricultural goods at a competitive rate are hampered by the high levels of insecurity in the south. The imposition of 'nuisance taxes' by what is reported to be predominantly corrupt government officials, high transportation costs, and the low level of demand for agricultural commodities in the southern region of Afghanistan further reduces the profit margins on annual and perennial horticultural crops. As opposed to other parts of the country evidence of traders buying these 'legal' crops at the farmgate is limited.

In contrast opium continues to be almost the only crop that traders are willing to travel to the farmgate to purchase, absorbing what would appear to be the high cost of doing any kind of business in the southern region. Given the physical and economic risks associated with travelling from the farmgate to the bazaar in the south it should be of little surprise that farmers continue to cultivate opium poppy despite its dwindling profitability. After all cultivating other crops and transporting them to the market leaves farmers vulnerable to intimidation, violence and extortion from a range of state and non-state actors, even in those areas in relatively close proximity to the provincial centres of Helmand, Kandahar and Farah.

Evidence shows that the solution to opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan lies with a combination of improved security, governance and economic growth. Where this in place farmers can reduce and subsequently abandon cultivation. However, simply replacing opium poppy with wheat will not prove sustainable due to small landholdings, the frequency of crop failure and the nature of the market for wheat in the region. In some circumstances, such as in the province of Nangarhar where land holdings are particularly small, pressing communities to forego opium poppy cultivation for a further season at a time of increasing wheat prices, lower precipitation and in the absence of viable off-farm and non-farm income opportunities may destabilise the region. In other areas the shift to wheat may be only at the margins aimed at maintaining food security and may not prove sustainable with a change in the regional market for wheat and in particular any shift in the stance of the Government of Pakistan's policy on wheat exports to Afghanistan.

It is evident from both Afghanistan and other illicit drug producing countries that a combination of efforts will be required to produce a sustainable reduction in opium poppy cultivation. However, establishing viable markets for legal cash crops and a conducive environment for transporting these goods safely, and at a minimum cost, is an important first step to creating the conditions for those households nearer the provincial centres in the southern region to make the move out of opium poppy. This not only requires the international community to look at how it might support local production through scaling up investments in the agricultural sector and increasing efforts aimed at local procurement but also how it can assist the Government of

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Afghanistan build popular support in the rural areas by increasing the delivery of services and acting against those involved in intimidating and extorting the local population. Indeed, achieving this is likely to have a greater impact on levels of opium poppy cultivation (and probably counter insurgency) than many of the activities more typically labelled as 'counter narcotics' such as interdiction, eradication and alternative livelihoods.

ANNEX 1

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