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**UNDCP**  
Afghanistan  
Programme

**Drug  
Control  
Monitoring  
System  
(AFG/C27)**

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# AFGHANISTAN

## STRATEGIC STUDY #6

### The Role of Women in Opium Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan.



**Final Report  
June 2000**

*'As long as I remember I have been working in my fathers house and now I work in my husband's house.'*

Female respondent, Kalafgan district, Takhar

*'We work shoulder to shoulder with our men in carrying seed and fertiliser to the field; reaping wheat and grinding the maize; planting rice and onion, and weeding onion and opium poppy; and when our men plough the land we prepare food for them.'*

Female respondent Sarobi district, Kabul

*'I have a positive view of poppy. If it is forbidden we will have to leave the village. If there isn't poppy cultivation, poor women will have to work as servants in someone else's house. I myself would prefer to die of a lack of food. I do not want to work as a servant.'*

Female respondent, Khash district, Badakhshan

*'Preparing food for the labourers influences our other agricultural and household activities. I have to prepare food several times a day and make tea, as well as taking the food and tea to the fields. I also have to take care of our children, wash the clothes and look after the house and myself. Sometimes even if I or my children get sick we cannot go and see a doctor because we are just too caught up in our agricultural activities.'*

Female respondent Sarobi district, Kabul

*'All relatives living here are close relatives, therefore, we feel ashamed to work on the fields away from our homes'*

Female respondent Qarghai district, Laghman

*'My view is that opium poppy cultivation requires a lot of labour for weeding, lancing, collecting opium and processing byproducts. But still in spite of all this we want to grow opium poppy because the opium produced will cover all our economic problems and we will be able to repay our loan and regain our land from our tenants.'*

Female respondent Sarobi district, Kabul

*'I was in school for six years. I had never undertaken agricultural activities before. I am now married into a family who are farmers by profession. I am obliged to work in the fields to support my in-laws because we are very poor. In fact, agricultural activities are the most difficult task I have done in my life.'*

Female respondent Qarghai district, Laghman

*'As we carry out very heavy jobs we are always suffering from illnesses. During weeding we are in the fields for 3 to 4 days consecutively and we feel severe pain in our legs. We suffer from headaches during the collection of opium.'*

Female respondent Sarobi district, Kabul

*'I do not have someone to take food to the field for the labourer and my husband, therefore, I must take it. This is the most difficult part of my job because I have to carry my baby too.'*

Female respondent, Surkhrud district, Nangarhar

## **The Strategic Studies Series**

One of UNDCP's principal objectives is to strengthen international action against illicit drug production. In Afghanistan, its principal objective is to reduce and eventually eliminate existing and potential sources of opium cultivation. It is recognised that in order to achieve this there is a need to further the understanding of the diversity of conditions and priorities that different socio-economic and spatial groups take into account when making decisions about their involvement in opium poppy cultivation.

The Strategic Study Series is one of the tools by which UNDCP intends to document the process of lesson learning within the ongoing Afghanistan Programme. Studies in this series will focus on issues that are considered to be of strategic importance to improving the design of current and future alternative development initiatives in Afghanistan. Information collection for these studies is undertaken by the UNDCP Drug Control Monitoring System (AFG/C27) in close coordination with the ongoing presence and project activities of UNDCP's Poppy Crop Reduction project (AFG/C28). Recognising the inherent problems associated with undertaking research into the drugs issue in Afghanistan, emphasis is given to verifying findings through systematic information-gathering techniques and methodological pluralism. As such, the Studies will be undertaken in an iterative manner, seeking to consolidate preliminary findings with further fieldwork. It is envisaged that this approach will allow panel or longitudinal studies to be undertaken which assess both the changes in opium poppy cultivation and lives and livelihoods amongst different socio-economic, gender and spatial groups over the lifetime of the Afghanistan programme.

These Strategic Studies will be an integral part of the regional study, '*The Dynamics of the Illicit Opiate Industry in South West Asia*' due to be published and disseminated in early 2001. The purpose of this regional study will be to: (i) contextualise the illicit drugs situation in South West Asia for the donor community, addressing issues of interest to their development agendas, including poverty, health, gender and the environment (ii) and for UNDCP to identify 'best practice' in the design and implementation of alternative development, law enforcement and demand reduction initiatives.

### **Strategic Studies will include:**

- *An Analysis of the Process of Expansion of Opium Poppy Cultivation to New Districts in Afghanistan.*
- *The Dynamics of the Farmgate Opium Trade and the Coping Strategies of Opium Traders.*
- *The Role of Opium as a Source of Informal Credit.*
- *The Role of Opium as a Livelihood Strategy for Returnees.*
- *Access to Labour: The Role of Opium in the Livelihood Strategies of Itinerant Harvesters Working in Helmand Province, Afghanistan.*
- *The Role of Women in Opium Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan*
- *'The Balloon Effect': An Analysis of the Process of Relocation of Opium Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan.*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

Opium poppy and coca are labour intensive crops and, as such, households tend to maximise the use of the household labour as a means of minimising production costs. Consequently, women and children, are thought to play a significant role in opium and coca cultivation in most of the major drug crop producing regions of the world. This phenomenon would appear to be as true in Afghanistan and Pakistan as it is in Latin America or South East Asia, despite the practice of seclusion, known as *purdah*, in the opium producing regions of the 'golden crescent'.

Indeed, in Afghanistan, the livelihood choices of women are often limited by the practice of *purdah*. This tradition governs the movement and participation of women in both public and private domains. Whilst *purdah* is not applied uniformly across all socio-economic, spatial, or cultural groups in Afghanistan, it often imposes severe restrictions on the movement of women in public places, particularly in those areas currently ruled by the Taliban. As such, women often find themselves excluded from the limited off-farm and non-farm income opportunities that are currently available in Afghanistan, confining their productive role largely to on-farm income opportunities, including agricultural crops and livestock.

Previous fieldwork in Afghanistan has indicated that households do not attribute an economic cost to family labour. Indeed, within the context of seclusion, the economic value that the household attributes to women's labour is diminished by the absence of alternative income opportunities that are considered both culturally appropriate and, in the current economic climate of Afghanistan, have higher returns. It is also important to note that the low opportunity cost attributed to women's labour, tends to make labour intensive crops, such as opium poppy, a more attractive option for the household.

However, as yet, the scale and nature of women's involvement in drug crop cultivation has not been documented in detail, particularly in those countries where access to women is problematic. Consequently, due to cultural constraints on the participation of women and an absence of detailed information on the gender disaggregated nature of drug crop cultivation, alternative development interventions have typically focused on working with the men of the household, except where specific 'women components' have been identified. Whilst greater efforts are currently being made to mainstream a gender perspective into alternative development interventions, there is a need for both development and drug control analysts to recognise that a failure to address the role of women in opium poppy and coca cultivation will ultimately have an effect on both conventional and alternative development objectives.

This *Study* seeks to explore the role that women play in the cultivation of opium poppy in Afghanistan and how this differs by socio-economic, cultural and spatial groups. It aims to identify the strategic role that women play as 'agents of change' within the household and establish mechanisms by which this can be utilised to influence the myriad of socio-economic,

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environmental and political processes that influence households in their decision to cultivate opium poppy. This *Study* also seeks to develop a clearer understanding of the possible impact that household coping strategies to alternative development will have on women's economic and social standing, as well as identify the strategic niches by which women's practical and strategic needs might be addressed by development interventions that seek to reduce drug crop cultivation in Afghanistan.

## Methodology

This *Study* is based on 157 semi-structured interviews with women conducted between 15 June and 21 November 1999. In total 97 interviews were conducted prior to the opium poppy harvest in 1999 in the districts of Kalafgan in Takhar province, and Argo, Darayem, Faizabad, Jurm, Khash and Tashkgan in the province of Badakhshan. A further 60 interviews were undertaken in the eastern region during the opium poppy planting season of October/ November 1999 in the districts of Qarghai in Laghman province, Sarobi in Kabul province, Sarkani in Kunar province and Surkhrud in the province of Nangarhar.

In both the northern and the eastern regions the fieldwork was undertaken by 4 female staff who travelled in the company of their nearest male relative, known as a *mahram*. Gaining access to women in both these areas was problematic, requiring considerable commitment and initiative on behalf of both the female and male members of the teams. Fieldwork was not undertaken in the southern region due to problems of access, as well as the results of previous fieldwork, which suggested that the role of women in agricultural activities located outside the family compound, and specifically opium poppy, was generally limited. In order to distinguish between generic patterns and localised issues, as well as verify findings, this *Study* conducted in-depth interviews with women respondents over a wide geographical area within each of the districts.

It is important to recognize that the fieldwork for this *Study* did not seek to undertake a comprehensive gender analysis but sought to generate a clearer understanding of the role of women in opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. Whilst an externality of this process has been a clearer understanding of the different productive and reproductive roles of men and women, only women were interviewed for the purpose of this *Study*.

## Findings

The *Study* reveals that women play a fundamental role in the cultivation of opium poppy in the northern and eastern regions of Afghanistan. Respondents in both regions, reported that they were involved in a number of stages of opium poppy cultivation, including: planting, weeding; thinning; lancing the capsules; collecting the opium; clearing the fields; breaking the capsules and removing the seed; cleaning the seed; and processing byproducts such as oil and soap. The preparation of food for hired or reciprocal labour was also cited by a significant number of respondents when discussing their role in opium poppy cultivation. Indeed, in both regions there

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was a general consensus that women provided the bulk of the labour at each stage of opium poppy cultivation, except its harvest.

Moreover, as a labour intensive crop it would appear that households seek to utilise a variety of different social mechanisms to access low cost labour for the cultivation of opium poppy. Priority would appear to be given to utilising household labour, including women and children. Indeed, almost all those interviewed worked on opium poppy outside the family compound, even where *purdah* precluded their involvement in the cultivation of other crops outside the confines of the home. Reciprocal labour arrangements, known as *ashar*, also allowed households to access low cost labour, mainly from neighbouring households or villages. Whilst *ashar* labour was used on a variety of crops, opium poppy featured most prominently as the crop that reciprocal labour was allocated to. Women and children were found to provide *ashar* labour for neighbouring households.

Further, the *Study* suggests that the role of women in agricultural production is largely determined by the life cycle of the household, the location of household fields, and other reproductive and productive tasks that women undertake during the agricultural year. The availability of sufficient labour within the household can often mean that women are not required to work outside the family compound, cultivating either opium poppy or wheat. However, a woman whose husband is sick, a widow, or a woman with young children, or married daughters, will often be required to assist with the cultivation of opium poppy due to the labour intensive nature of the crop. In the north, the location of rainfed wheat crops, some distance from the household, generally mitigates against the use of female labour due to the practice of *purdah* and women's reproductive role within the household.

Indeed, the scale and nature of women's involvement in opium poppy cultivation was found to differ both between and within areas in accordance with the practice of *purdah*. For instance, in the north, women were generally found to be more involved in the harvesting, in particular the lancing, of opium poppy than in the east, where there was a greater reliance on the use of hired labour. Yet in both regions, there were villages where women's participation in agricultural production was constrained by the practice of *purdah*. Respondents reported that those households with fields located nearer the roadside, or in areas where itinerant labourers were frequently working, were particularly 'honour bound' to comply with the practice of seclusion due to the 'public' arena in which they were working. In those households that had sufficient male or child labour, the role of women in opium poppy cultivation was generally limited to the breaking of capsules, the cleaning of seeds and the processing of the byproducts, with some weeding, if required. However, for those households with limited human and financial capacity, women were required to work in all the stages of opium poppy cultivation, including lancing, and the collection of opium.

The *Study* reveals that in the north, the preference for cultivating opium poppy on irrigated land, located near the family compound, meant that women's involvement in its cultivation was often considered more appropriate both to the rules of *purdah* and their reproductive responsibilities, than their work on other rainfed crops, such as wheat. Indeed, 95% of those women interviewed

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in the north reported that they were actively involved in the cultivation of opium poppy outside the confines of the family compound whilst only 13% reported that they cultivated wheat outside the family compound. The situation in the east suggests that there is less gender differentiation in the cultivation of winter crops, with 93% of respondents reporting that they are actively involved in the cultivation of wheat outside the family compound, known as a *qala*, and 97% reporting that they cultivated opium poppy outside the confines of the family compound. According to the reports of key informants and respondents themselves, the distinguishing factor is the predominance of rainfed land in the north, on which wheat tends to be cultivated, and its distance from the *qala*.

Whilst the hiring of labour and reciprocal labour arrangements was found to release women from many of their agricultural responsibilities in opium poppy and wheat cultivation, their domestic burden increased considerably due to the need to provide food to labourers as a payments in-kind. The provision of two meals for *ashar* labour was considered standard practice by respondents, resulting in an increase in the domestic burden of women. This was often exacerbated by the loss of assistance from other family members who also found themselves drafted into agricultural activities during the harvest season. Hiring labour was considered particularly labour intensive for women given that three meals were typically provided, except for some areas in the eastern region. There was a general consensus that the extra burden imposed on women during the harvest season due to the need to prepare food for itinerant harvesters, as well as attend to their own agricultural duties, was to the detriment of personal and family health care. Whilst, for those respondents in the east who did not provide food for hired labour, the employment of itinerant labourers during the wheat and opium harvest was seen as a major benefit, allowing them to focus on what they reported were preferable activities, including childcare and the maintenance of the household.

The *Study* suggests that women play a leading role in animal husbandry and as such make an important contribution to both household cash income and assets. Indeed, respondents indicated that the majority of tasks associated with animal husbandry were the sole responsibility of the women of the household, including feeding and tending livestock, processing dairy products and meat byproducts, and converting animal waste into fuel. As such, interventions aimed at improving productivity in the livestock sector and the value added of dairy and meat byproducts, may serve to increase the opportunity cost of women's labour and reduce their availability for opium poppy cultivation.

It is interesting to note that generally, women appeared to have limited decision-making powers over household cropping patterns despite their active involvement in agricultural production. Indeed, even where the male members of the household were either, absent or dead, younger male relatives or even agricultural employees were found to have more decision-making powers over household cropping patterns than the female members of the household.

The *Study* reveals that the cultivation of opium poppy is considered long and arduous work by most of the women interviewed. As such, many respondents indicated that they would welcome the opportunity to undertake alternative tasks were they not required to work on opium poppy.

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Weeding was considered a particularly difficult task, requiring as much as 8 hours per day. The lancing of opium capsules was also identified as a stage of cultivation at which many women would prefer not to be involved, citing long days, subsequent sickness, and the loss of time for child care and household chores, as negative consequences of their participation. Food preparation for itinerant harvesters or reciprocal labour, during the opium poppy harvest was also reported to increase the domestic burden of women, which was further exacerbated for those women who were also required to participate in the harvest itself.

The *Study* reveals that whilst there is a recognition that opium poppy cultivation does not conform with religious mores and that it represents a potential threat to household health, the majority of women interviewed believed there are few alternatives that can currently satisfy the multi-functional role that opium poppy plays in household livelihood strategies in Afghanistan. Opium poppy currently provides access to credit, cash income, land and labour. It has a number of byproducts that have both a use and exchange value, including oil, soap and stalks for winter fuel. Opium itself is a high value – low weight, non-perishable product that has an almost guaranteed market in-country. Whilst not necessarily the most profitable crop due to the labour intensive nature of cultivation, considerable fluctuations in its price, and the tendency to sell the crop on an advance basis, particularly amongst the resource poor, opium poppy is a low cost crop in a high risk environment. As such, opium poppy has an integral role in the complex livelihood strategies that households currently pursue in rural Afghanistan, which both women and men recognise and generally support.

## **Conclusion**

The *Study* concludes that a failure to develop alternative on farm, off farm or non-farm income opportunities for women will raise the risks that households associate with alternative development interventions in Afghanistan. Indeed, the current absence of alternative income opportunities that are considered culturally appropriate and, in the current economic climate of Afghanistan, have higher returns, has led to women's labour being perceived as having a low opportunity cost. This has made labour intensive crops like opium poppy more attractive to the household. Efforts need to be made to raise the opportunity cost of women's labour if alternative development interventions are to achieve their objectives without acting to the detriment of women's economic and social standing within the household.

## **Recommendations**

The *Study* recommends that if both alternative and conventional development objectives are to be achieved, there is a need to mainstream a gender perspective into development interventions aimed at reducing opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. Indeed, a failure to address the needs of women as both economic and social actors within the household, will raise the risks that households associate with alternative development interventions, prompting households to adopt a number of coping strategies in response to alternative development interventions, including



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possible relocation on a short term or long term basis.

In particular, the *Study* advocates that gender analysis should be undertaken at each stage of the project cycle. Without a clear understanding of how productive, reproductive and community roles are differentiated by gender, project interventions can be at best prove ineffective, and at worst prove counter-productive. Ongoing impact monitoring data, disaggregated by both gender and socio-economic status, is an essential tool for both project management and the evolution of project strategy. Moreover, as previous strategic studies have illustrated, a failure to address the needs and the concerns of the most vulnerable members of the community may be to the detriment of both conventional and alternative development objectives.

Recognising the paucity of information on gender roles in southern Afghanistan, the *Study* recommends that a comprehensive gender analysis needs to be undertaken as a matter of priority under the auspices of the proposed Helmand Initiative. This should be undertaken as part of a broader framework of stakeholder analysis and should be conducted prior to the implementation of programme activities. The timing and mode of implementation for this analysis needs to be discussed between the members of the Helmand Planning Group and the UN Gender Adviser.

The *Study* recognises that animal husbandry is an important economic activity in which women have almost sole responsibility within the household. Whilst the restrictions on the mobility of women have imposed constraints, efforts by FAO Livestock have illustrated that it is possible to address the practical and strategic needs of women through interventions in the livestock sector. The *Study* recommends that greater efforts should be made by UNDCP to explore the potential for closer partnership with FAO Livestock as a means of raising the opportunity cost of women's labour.

The *Study* also recommends that greater consideration should be given to supporting community-based-childcare arrangements that could address the practical needs of women, particularly during busy periods in the agricultural calendar.

Finally, the *Study* suggest that there is a need to raise the social cost that households associate with opium poppy cultivation. Problem drug use is a growing problem amongst men and women in both rural and urban Afghanistan, as well as the Afghan community in Pakistan and Iran. More needs to be done to incorporate information regarding problem drug use within the Afghan community into alternative development initiatives in Afghanistan. Women seem to be particularly aware that opium poppy cultivation does not conform with religious mores and that it represents a potential threat to household health and, given improving socio-economic conditions, may be able to act as 'agents of change' within the household. Indeed, whilst women would not appear to have explicit decision making powers over household cropping patterns, they undoubtedly have influence over the men of the household given their role in biological and social reproduction, as well as important sources of agricultural and domestic labour. Existing initiatives, including micro-enterprise development, health education and horticultural projects, might all serve as vehicles by which to raise women's awareness of the long term social costs opium cultivation will exact on the Afghan community.

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## 1. Objective

To further UNDCP's understanding of the role of women in opium poppy cultivation and the consequences arising from its replacement for their economic and social standing.

## 2. Introduction

Opium poppy cultivation, like coca, is a labour intensive task. Indeed, estimates for Afghanistan suggest that one hectare of opium poppy requires 350 person days.<sup>1</sup> Previous fieldwork has revealed that households have adopted a number of strategies to spread the demand on both family and hired labour, including staggered planting and cultivating a combination of both short and long maturing varieties of opium poppy. Moreover, to minimise the need for hired labour, households have been found to cultivate opium at a level that is commensurate with household labour supply.

Maximising the use of household labour, and entering into reciprocal labour arrangements, has proven to be essential to minimising the cost of opium poppy cultivation. As such, women, and often children, have provided an important source of labour for opium poppy cultivation in many parts of Afghanistan. Indeed in other regions questions have been raised over the final profitability of illicit drug crops, such as opium and coca, were it not for the use of unpaid family labour.<sup>2</sup>

In Afghanistan, the livelihood choices of women are often limited by the traditional practice of *purdah*. This tradition governs the movement and participation of women in both public and private domains. Whilst *purdah* is not applied uniformly across all socio-economic, spatial, or cultural groups in Afghanistan, it often imposes severe restrictions on the movement of women in public places, particularly in those areas currently ruled by the Taliban.<sup>3</sup> As such, women often find themselves excluded from the limited off-farm and non-farm income opportunities that are currently available in Afghanistan, confining their productive role largely to on-farm income

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<sup>1</sup> This figure, derived from the Socio-Economic Baseline for UNDCP's Target Districts in Afghanistan, is consistent with estimates provided by other analysts in South and South East Asia. See discussion in Mansfield (1996) *Alternative Development: The Modern Thrust of Supply Side Policy* in Mansfield and Whetton *Illicit Drugs in Developing Countries: A Literature Review*. A paper commissioned by the Economic and Social Council on Research of the UK Government's Department for International Development.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, Lee and Clawson suggest that labour is the most significant factor in household production costs for coca, accounting for 64% to 92% of total costs, depending on the technical level of production. For more details see Lee and Clawson (1993) *Crop Substitution in the Andes*. Agency for International Development, Centre for Development Information and Evaluation: Washington D.C. In Laos, women are thought to provide 62% of the labour required for opium poppy cultivation. See Lao National Commission for Drug Control/UNDCP (1998) *National Opium Survey 1997/1998*. Draft Report: Vientiane.

<sup>3</sup> See Christine Aziz (1998) *'Defiance and oppression: the situation of women'* in *Essential Field Guides to Humanitarian and Conflict Zones: Afghanistan* edited by E. Girardet and J. Walter. Crossline Communications: Geneva.

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opportunities, including agricultural crops and livestock.

Previous fieldwork has indicated that households do not attribute an economic cost to family labour.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, within the context of seclusion, the economic value that the household attributes to women's labour is diminished by the absence of alternative income opportunities that are considered both culturally appropriate and, in the current economic climate of Afghanistan, have higher returns.<sup>5</sup> It is also important to note that the low opportunity cost attributed to women's labour tends to make labour intensive crops, such as opium poppy, a more attractive option for the household.

This *Study* seeks to explore the role that women play in the cultivation of opium poppy in Afghanistan and how this differs by socio-economic, cultural and spatial groups. It aims to identify the strategic role that women play as '*agents of change*' within the household and establish mechanisms by which this can be utilised to influence the myriad of socio-economic, environmental and political processes that influence households in their decision to cultivate opium poppy. This *Study* also seeks to develop a clearer understanding of the possible impact that household coping strategies to alternative development will have on women's economic and social standing, as well as identify the strategic niches by which women's practical and strategic needs might be addressed by development interventions that seek to reduce drug crop cultivation in Afghanistan.

### 3. Methodology

This *Study* is based on 157 semi-structured interviews with women conducted between 15 June and 21 November 1999. In total 97 interviews were conducted prior to the opium poppy harvest in 1999 in the districts of Kalafgan in Takhar province, and Argo, Darayem, Faizabad, Jurm, Khash and Teshkan districts in the province of Badakhshan.<sup>5</sup> A further 60 interviews were undertaken in the eastern region during the opium poppy planting season of October/ November 1999 in the districts of Qarghai in Laghman province, Sarobi in Kabul province, Sarkani in Kunar province and Surkhrud in the province of Nangarhar.

In both the northern and eastern regions the fieldwork was undertaken by 4 female staff who travelled in the company of their nearest male relative, known as a *mahram*. Gaining access to women respondents in both these areas was problematic, requiring considerable commitment and initiative on behalf of both the female and male members of the teams.

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<sup>4</sup> See *Strategic Study 1: An Analysis of the Process of Expansion of Opium Poppy Cultivation to New Districts in Afghanistan (Preliminary Report)*. UNDCP: Islamabad.

<sup>5</sup> Before the conflict began in 1979, Argo and Darayem were sub-districts of Faizabad, whilst Khash and Teshkan were sub-districts of Jurm and Keshem, respectively. However, under the current administrative structure in Badakhshan these former sub-districts now have the status of districts in their own right.

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Fieldwork was not undertaken in the southern region due to problems of access,<sup>6</sup> as well as the results of previous fieldwork, which suggested that the role of women in agricultural activities located outside the family compound was generally limited, and that their specific responsibilities with regard to opium poppy cultivation were largely restricted to the provision of food for itinerant labourers during the harvest period.<sup>7</sup>

Fieldwork consisted of semi-structured interviews with approximately 15 women in each of the districts. These interviews were conducted in a conversational manner, and due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter, notes were not taken during the interview but written-up once the interview had finished and the interviewer had departed.

Due to the paucity of household socio-economic data for Afghanistan, and the underground nature of the drugs issue, identifying representative samples for social research in Afghanistan is problematic. Therefore, in order to verify findings and distinguish between generic patterns and localised issues, in-depth interviews were conducted over a wide geographical area within each of the districts. The results of the fieldwork for this *Study* were also compared with previous fieldwork undertaken by the project and the limited secondary data that is currently available.

Despite constraints on land ownership, as members of the household and important sources of agricultural labour, female respondents were generally found to be fully aware of the extent of household land and the range of crops cultivated on it. However, where sharecroppers or tenants were employed, respondents did appear to be less familiar with cropping patterns and the mechanisms for accessing labour on this land. However, on household land, women respondents could provide a clear account of the scale and nature of labour employed despite their limited decision-making powers. Their knowledge of the mechanism used for accessing labour would seem to be closely associated with their direct involvement in *ashar* labour and their responsibilities for food provision for both hired and reciprocal labour arrangements.

It is important to recognize that the fieldwork for this *Study* did not seek to undertake a comprehensive gender analysis but sought to generate a clearer understanding of the role of women in opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. Whilst an externality of this process has been a clearer understanding of the different productive and reproductive roles of men and women,

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<sup>6</sup> The fieldwork for the Socio-Economic Baseline revealed that respondents in the southern province of Qandahar were particularly sensitive to attempts to gather gender disaggregated information. For more details see *Socio Economic Baseline for UNDCP's Target Districts in Afghanistan*. UNDCP: Islamabad. (forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup> For instance, in the southern districts of Ghorak, Khakrez and Maiwand, in Qandahar province, only two respondents out of a total of 420, reported that the women of the household worked in agricultural activities outside the family compound. This figure compares to almost 40% of respondents in the district of Shinwar, in Nangarhar province in the eastern region. For more details, see the *Socio Economic Baseline for UNDCP's Target Districts in Afghanistan*. UNDCP: Islamabad. (forthcoming). These findings were supported by a smaller Scoping Study that explored household labour inputs, disaggregated by gender, amongst a limited number of respondents in UNDCP's four target districts. The fieldwork for *Strategic Study 4: Access to Labour: The Role of Opium in the Livelihood Strategies of Itinerant Harvesters Working in Helmand Province, Afghanistan* reiterates these findings, suggesting that during the harvest period, the role of women was largely restricted to the arduous task of preparing food and drink for itinerant harvesters.

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only women were interviewed for the purpose of this *Study*.

#### 4. Ethnic Background and Age

Almost 44% of those interviewed in the northern region were Uzbek, whilst approximately 56% were Tadjik. In the eastern region, the dominant ethnic group was *Pashtoons*, comprising three quarters of all those interviewed. However, almost 24% of those interviewed in the eastern region were Tadjik and one respondent in the district of Surkhrud reported that they were originally of Arabic origins.

In the north, respondents ranged from 25 years of age to 60, with an average age of 41. In the eastern region, the average age of respondents was 35, and the age of those interviewed varied from 18 to 62.

In total, only 3% of respondents were found to be widows, four of which were in the northern region and one in the eastern region.

#### 5. Access to Land

Although, traditionally land was inherited by both sons and daughters in Afghanistan, typically it is the male of the household that maintains property rights. Indeed, the problem of land fragmentation has prompted many households to maintain land collectively, distributing property rights to several sons who work the land and share the proceeds on a joint basis.

In the north, household landholdings amongst respondents were found to range enormously, from those without any land to those with approximately 25 hectares. Indeed, of those interviewed in the northern region, 14% were found to be from landless households and the remaining 86% from landowning households.



**Figure 1:** Young women collecting opium in Darayem district, Badakhshan.

Between the districts, average household landholdings amongst respondents were found to vary little with all but the district of Teshkan having landholdings of between 3 and 4 hectares. However, in Teshkan the average household landholding of respondents was almost 6 hectares

of land, the significant majority of which was reported to be unirrigated. In the northern region, the average landholding amongst those respondents from households that owned land was 3.34 hectares, the greater proportion of which was rainfed.

In the north, 30% of those respondents whose household owned land, employed sharecroppers on some, or all, of their land, whilst a further 8% leased some, or all, of their land to a tenant. All those interviewed who were from landless households, sharecropped land for a landowner, and received either one third or one half of the final yield of the land, depending on their contribution of agricultural inputs.

Tenancy arrangements were found to differ according to the quality of the land and the negotiating power of the two parties involved. Consequently, respondents reported that the cost of leasing one hectare of land could vary from 125 kg to 650 kg of wheat, or 190kg to 250 kg of rice, or cash payments of between \$240 and \$430. Of course, a premium was paid on irrigated land.

The average landholdings of those households who employed sharecroppers in the north was found to be almost 3.5 hectares, differing only marginally from average landholdings in the region. However, those respondents whose household leased their land were found to have, on average, slightly more than 1 hectare of land, highlighting the relatively weaker position that those leasing land in Afghanistan find themselves compared to those employing sharecroppers. Indeed, those respondents whose household leased their land indicated that growing household debts, or the life cycle of the household, including the death of their husband, or the young age or absence of children of a working age, had prompted them to allow others to cultivate their land (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Average household landholdings amongst landowners who cultivate their own land, employ sharecroppers, and lease their land to tenants, in the northern and eastern regions of Afghanistan (hectares)**

Region	Average Household Landholdings		
	Cultivate Own Land (ha)	Employ Sharecropper (ha)	Lease Land to Tenant (ha)
Northern	3.36	3.45	1.04
Eastern	3.74	5.26	2.39

In the eastern region, one quarter of those interviewed reported that their household was landless, the majority of which were to be found in the districts of Sarobi and Qarghai. The average landholding amongst landowning households interviewed in the eastern region was found to be marginally less than in the north, at 3.5 hectares. However, much of this land was found to be irrigated and therefore have a higher productive potential. The largest household landholding amongst those interviewed in the east was in Qarghai where one respondent reported owning 12 hectares of land, all of which was worked by sharecroppers.

In general, there was little difference between the average household landholdings amongst those interviewed in Qarghai, Sarkani and Surkhrud, at between 3 and 4 hectares. However, in Sarobi

district the household landholdings of respondents were found to differ markedly with an average of only 1.3 hectares. The mountainous terrain in this district, particularly in the northern part, would appear to obviate against larger landholdings.

There was a noticeable difference between the level of land ownership and the incidence of sharecropping or tenancy arrangements in the eastern region. In total 16% of those interviewed were from households that employed sharecroppers and a further 20% were from households that leased all or some of their land to tenants. Analysis suggests that the average landholdings of those households that employed sharecroppers was 5.26 hectares compared to an overall average of almost 3.5 hectares for those households that owned land. Similar to the trend in the north, those households in the eastern region that leased some or all of their land to tenants were found to have lower than average landholdings, owning only 2.39 hectares of land.



Figure 2: Young children clearing opium poppy fields in Faizabad district, Badakhshan.

As in the north, sharecropping arrangements in the east were found to differ according to the agricultural inputs that were contributed by each party. As such, those sharecroppers that purely provided their labour and did not contribute to the costs of farm power, fertiliser, seed, or hired labour received only one sixth to one fifth of the final crop. However, for those that owned their own oxen for land preparation, the share could increase to as much as one third of the final crop. Those respondents whose households contributed half the costs of all agricultural inputs, as well as their own household labour, could receive as much as 50% of the final crop.<sup>8</sup>

Tenancy arrangements were found to differ both within and between districts, with considerably higher rents paid in the district of Surkhrud in the province of Nangarhar. Here tenants paid as much as 1,400 kg to 2,000 kg of wheat per hectare compared to only 200 kg to 375 kg in the district of Qarghai in Laghman. In the district of Sarobi a number of respondents reported that their household leased their land from the 'government', referring to the Taliban authorities, but did not indicate what the tenancy arrangements were.

<sup>8</sup> In Afghanistan, sharecropping arrangements allow the landless to gain access to land, subsistence crops and perhaps some surplus cash income, depending on the crops grown and their productivity. Landowners gain access to a relatively cheap and secure labour supply through the employment of sharecroppers. However, it is important to note that sharecropping arrangements allow the risk of crop failure to be shared by both landed and landless. Moreover, given the division of agricultural inputs by both parties, with the sharecropper mainly providing labour, and the proportional distribution of the final crop, it is in the economic interests of the landowner to cultivate labour intensive crops such as opium poppy. Whilst previous fieldwork has revealed that there is a degree of consultation between landowner and sharecropper, the final decision over which crops are grown lie with the landlord. Previous fieldwork has also revealed that tenancy is the preferred option of the landless.

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## 7. Women's Role in Agricultural Decision Making

In the north, only 2% of those interviewed indicated that they were actively involved in the decision over what agricultural crops the household should cultivate. Both these respondents were widows one of whom employed a sharecropper to cultivate the land, whilst the other made decisions over cropping in conjunction with her son. However, the other two respondents in the north who were widowed reported that their '*husband's nephew*' and their sharecropper decided what would be cultivated.

In the eastern region, only one respondent reported that she was actively involved in decisions over cropping, and again, as a widow, this was done in conjunction with her son. Indeed, typically respondents in both regions reported that their '*husband*', '*father*', '*father-in-law*' or '*son*' determined what crops would be grown on the land.

As such despite the overwhelming burden of women in agricultural activities in Afghanistan, and particularly in opium poppy cultivation, it would seem that they have little direct role in decisions over the crops the household cultivates. This is perhaps best highlighted by the decision making powers that agricultural employees would seem to gain in the absence of the men of the family, despite the continued presence of the women of the household. For instance, a respondent in Sarobi indicated that decisions over cropping were made by the family sharecropper when the men of the household were absent on military maneuvers.

*'The cultivation of poppy is men's choice. Whenever they stop we will be happy to get rid of weeding poppy.'*

Female respondent, Teshkan district, Badakhshan

*'Agricultural activities have resulted in the elimination of other skills which we possessed such as embroidery and tailoring. This will seriously affect the future of our daughters.'*

Female respondent, Surkhrud district, Nangarhar

## 8. Cropping Patterns

Fieldwork revealed that there was a wide range of crops grown across both the northern and eastern regions and the socio-economic groups within them. Wheat and opium poppy were at the core of the cropping systems with almost all respondents belonging to households that cultivated both. Other crops cultivated included various fruit, legumes, cereals and vegetables, generally for household consumption.



Indeed, in the north, 22 different crops were cultivated, with almost all of those interviewed belonging to households that cultivated opium poppy and wheat. In fact, only two respondents reported that their household did not cultivate these two crops. The exceptions consisted of one respondent who only had enough land for a vegetable garden, whilst the other had given her land to a tenant after the death of her husband.

Mustard and cow pea were the next most widely cultivated agricultural crops in the north with 18% and 17% of respondents claiming their households cultivated them, respectively. Barley was cultivated by the households of 13% of those interviewed whilst 8% cultivated potato. Other crops cited by 5% of respondents, or less, were alfalfa, carrot, clover, coriander, flaxseed, leek, maize, melon, millet, mung bean, onion, radish, sunflower, turnip and water melon. Tobacco was cultivated by the households of 5% of those interviewed, however, all these cases were in the district of Darayem in Badakhshan



**Figure 3:** Family collecting opium in Faizabad district, Badakhshan.

In the eastern region, opium poppy and wheat were cultivated by the households of all those interviewed. However, there were no discernible cropping patterns with regard to other agricultural crops, with a wide and varied range of crops being grown by most households.

Whilst almost one quarter of respondents in the eastern region reported that their household cultivated onion, most of these were located in the districts of Sarobi and Qarghai. Barley, cauliflower, rice and turnips were cultivated by the households of 12% of those interviewed, whilst watermelon was cultivated by approximately 8% of respondents. Almost 7% of those interviewed reported that their household cultivated carrots, clover, cucumber or sugar cane on their household land. Cotton, eggplant, leek, lentil, maize, mung bean, okra, pea, potato, radish, and spinach were crops cultivated by the households of 5% of respondents or less. One respondent in the district of Sarobi also reported that they cultivated marijuana. In total, respondents were found to cultivate 23 different crops in the eastern region.

*'This year we grew wheat, onion and maize. The production was more or less okay but as we had to give half of the final yield to the landlord we do not have enough to satisfy our needs. Therefore, next year we have decided to cultivate opium on one jerib of our land. With this we hope to repay our loan and satisfy our needs.'*

**Female respondent Sarobi district, Kabul**

*'As our situation is poor and we know no other way to improve it, we have to do tough agricultural activities, shoulder to shoulder with our men. It is also a big problem for us as there are agricultural labourers working in this area.'*

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## 8. Women's Role in Agricultural Production

The role of women in agricultural production was found to differ by locality, as well as the life cycle and socio-economic status of the household.<sup>9</sup> Whilst women were found to be involved in a number of agricultural activities, particularly vegetable production, of particular interest to this *Study* was the scale and nature of work that women were found to undertake outside the confines of the family compound despite the practice of seclusion. Given that vegetable production was often cultivated within the confines of the *qala*, the main crops that women were found to cultivate outside the family compound were wheat and opium poppy.

### 8.1. The cultivation of wheat

Women's role in the cultivation of wheat was found to differ markedly between the northern and eastern regions. In the north, respondents reported that the cultivation of wheat was the responsibility of the men of the household. Typically those interviewed about their role in wheat cultivation, commented that *'men do the work, women just provide the food'*, *'women do little compared to men'* or *'women do not work on the land'*. Indeed, only 13% of the women interviewed in the north reported that they were actively involved in cultivating wheat outside the family compound.

Whilst a number of these women indicated that they assisted with the weeding or harvesting of wheat, if the land on which it was cultivated was near the home, only one respondent indicated that she was involved in all stages of wheat cultivation. As a widow with less than one half of one hectare she reported that she assisted her son from the preparation of the seed until the wheat was reaped, threshed and stored. Indeed, it is interesting to note that all those respondents who reported that they were widows were involved in wheat cultivation outside the *qala*. Moreover, the average landholding of those who were actively involved in wheat cultivation outside the family compound was one and three fifths of one hectare, compared to almost four hectares for those whose involvement was limited to activities within the confines of the *qala*.

The general consensus of those interviewed in the north was that their major task in wheat cultivation was the cleaning and storage of the final crop. Cleaning the wheat seed was reported to involve identifying good quality, larger seeds for cultivation and removing those seeds with diseases. Respondents suggested that this task was particularly laborious accounting for as much as 2 to 4 hours per day during the harvest period. During the harvest period, cooking for household, reciprocal and hired labour, was cited as the most time consuming activity that women undertook in relation to wheat cultivation.

Those respondents who did work on wheat cultivation outside the family compound reported that weeding was particularly hard work, consuming as much as 6-8 hours of their working day. Indeed, many of the women interviewed considered the weeding of land one of the most difficult tasks that they undertook, particularly for opium poppy where up to three rounds of weeding

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<sup>9</sup> Given that in Afghanistan households tend to consist of a number of nuclear families within the same extended family, access to resources and decisions over their final allocation tend to be made on the basis of the household and not the family.

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were undertaken on irrigated land. Very few respondents were involved in the reaping of wheat and none indicated that they were involved in the preparation of land prior to its planting.

The findings of the fieldwork in the northern region differ greatly from that in the east, given that 93% of women interviewed in the east reported that they were actively involved in wheat cultivation outside the family compound. Indeed, the significant majority of respondents in the east indicated that they were involved in all stages of wheat production, including land preparation, such as the clearing of fields of weeds and stems of maize; protecting the wheat fields from birds and other predators; and during the harvest, the reaping of wheat and its transportation to the household compound; as well as the final cleaning and storage of the final crop. In the east, the only task that was considered exclusive to the men of the household was that of ploughing and levelling the land.

Of course, the amount of time dedicated to each of these tasks was contingent on the other productive and reproductive roles women undertook and the availability of household labour. However, in the east, there was a general consensus that harvesting was the most time consuming task associated with wheat cultivation, requiring up to 8 hrs per day. Some respondents indicated that the harvesting of wheat was particularly intensive and was undertaken 'until we feel tired'.



**Figure 4:** Ploughing and levelling the land is the only agricultural task that is considered the exclusive responsibility of the men of the household.

Indeed, those women interviewed in the east considered that they undertook at least 60% of the work required for the cultivation of wheat, providing between 80-100% of the labour inputs for the clearing of land, 30-50% of the labour inputs required for harvesting, and 90-100% of the labour inputs needed to process and store the final crop. Perhaps, the active role of women in wheat cultivation outside the family compound in the eastern region, is best reflected by the fact that only 1% of respondents indicated that 'cooking' was one of their most important responsibilities during the wheat season, compared to 25% of those interviewed in the northern region.

It is also interesting to note that in the east, only 4% of those respondents who were actively involved in wheat cultivation outside the family compound, were found to be involved in its weeding, compared with 90% of those involved in the cultivation of opium poppy outside the *qala*. These figures differ greatly with the responses of those interviewed in the north, who indicated that 80% of those cultivating wheat outside the family compound were also involved in its weeding, as were 70% of those women found to be involved in cultivating opium poppy outside the confines of the *qala*.

An explanation for these contrasting results would appear to lie with the differing cropping

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cycles in the two regions, as well as the weeding requirements of rainfed wheat. For instance, in the east the agricultural cropping cycle for winter crops tends to rotate opium poppy and wheat annually, allowing land to be weeded intensively once every two years. In the first year, the land is cultivated with opium poppy and is weeded intensively, often using hired labour<sup>10</sup> paid for by an advance raised on the opium crop, known as *salaam*.<sup>11</sup>

As opium poppy also requires extensive thinning to maximize its yield, weeding is often undertaken at the same time in order to minimise labour costs and avoid duplication. After a summer crop, generally maize, wheat is grown the following winter. In the eastern region, the previous winters intensive weeding, the density of the wheat crop in the field, and the limited opportunities for obtaining an advance on wheat for the payment of hired labour, means that the land under wheat generally only receives a cursory weeding. In the north, however, wheat tends to be grown on rainfed land for only one year, followed by one year of fallow. As such, each year that wheat is cultivated, the land is weeded, mainly using household labour.

In the east, the majority of those respondents who were not actively involved in wheat cultivation, outside the *qala*, were to be found in the district of Surkhrud in Nangarhar province. These respondents reported that women in the area '*did not work outside*', focusing mainly on vegetable production within the confines of the *qala*. A similar local phenomenon was witnessed in Jurm in the northern region where 85% of those interviewed reported that they did not cultivate wheat outside the household compound due to restrictions on the mobility of women. Interestingly, despite this claim, all these women were found to be involved in the cultivation of opium poppy outside the *qala*, undertaking both weeding and lancing.

*'We work two or three hours per day clearing the fields, one or two hours daily scattering the seeds and the whole day making the bunches of wheat and collecting them.'*

Female respondent Sarobi district, Kabul

*'We were not allowed to work on wheat field, but the men asked us to work on poppy field because it needed more labour. It further increased our workload'*

Female respondent, Qarghai district, Laghman

## **8.2. The cultivation of opium poppy**

Women's role in wheat production in the north is in stark contrast to their role in opium poppy cultivation, where almost 95% of those interviewed were actively involved in cultivating opium poppy outside the family compound. The 5% of respondents who were not involved in opium poppy cultivation outside the *qala* were also not involved in wheat cultivation, claiming that they

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<sup>10</sup> Indeed, 55% of respondents in the eastern region were found to hire labourers for the weeding of opium poppy compared to only 4% in the north.

<sup>11</sup> Although an advance can be raised on other agricultural crops such as wheat, in many areas in Afghanistan opium poppy is not only the preferred crop but also the only crop on which an advance can be obtained. For more details see *Strategic Study 3: The Role of Opium as a Source of Informal Credit*. UNDCP: Islamabad.

were either landless; that sharecroppers or tenant farmers were working their land; that their household land was a long distance from their home; or that their husbands were 'strict'.

Moreover, not only were a greater proportion of women involved in opium poppy cultivation outside the household compound but they had generally been involved from a younger age. In those districts in the north that had cultivated opium poppy for a large number of years, the average age at which respondents first cultivated opium poppy was 12 years 9 months. However, 45% of these respondents claimed that they were 10 years or less when they first cultivated opium, the youngest being 6 years of age. In these same districts the average age at which respondents first cultivated wheat was 14 years and six months with only 10% of respondents reporting that they were 10 years or less when they first cultivated it. Indeed, a common response from those interviewed was that they first cultivated wheat 'after marriage' whilst opium poppy cultivation had very much been a responsibility that they had been allocated since childhood.



Figure 5: Opium poppy field after thinning and weeding, Dand district, Qandahar.

Key informants suggest that a possible explanation for the differing roles of women in opium poppy and wheat cultivation in the north, and the ages at which they first cultivated them, lies with the tendency to cultivate wheat on rainfed land some distance from the home. As gender segregation and seclusion requires that the mobility of women is restricted and, in particular, that contact with male strangers is avoided, women's access to rainfed land becomes problematic. Opium poppy, on the other hand, is generally cultivated on irrigated land near the home, allowing women to better manage both reproductive and productive roles in accordance with the strictures of *purdah*.

Whilst the extent of female involvement in opium poppy cultivation in the eastern region, conforms with that in the north, with 97% of those interviewed indicating that they cultivated opium poppy outside the family compound, the age at which they began to cultivate opium poppy would appear to differ completely. Indeed, in the east, fieldwork suggests that the average age at which respondents first cultivated opium poppy was 22 years and 10 months compared to 11 years and 9 months for wheat. The relatively recent introduction of opium poppy into household



Figure 6: Opium poppy capsules are broken and the seed removed and cleaned.

cropping patterns into the districts of Sarobi and Qarghai in the last three years would appear to explain this discrepancy.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, in the district of Sarkani which is reported to have cultivated opium poppy on a more 'traditional' basis, the average age at which respondents first cultivated opium poppy was 12 years and 3 months.

Respondents in both the northern and eastern regions reported that they were involved in a number of stages of cultivation, including: planting, weeding; thinning; lancing the capsules; collecting the opium; clearing the fields; breaking the capsules and removing the seed; cleaning the seed; and processing byproducts such as oil and soap. The preparation of food for hired or reciprocal labour was also cited by a significant number of respondents when discussing their role in opium poppy cultivation.



**Figure 7:** Young women collecting opium in Argo district, Badakhshan.

In both the north and east, there was a general consensus that women did more work than men at the weeding and thinning stage of opium poppy cultivation, whilst men played a more active role during lancing. For example, in the east women generally reported that they provided 60-80% of the total labour inputs required during the



**Figure 8:** Young girl clearing opium poppy fields in Faizabad district, Badakhshan.

weeding stage, compared to only 10-20% of the total labour inputs required for lancing and 20-40% of the total labour inputs required for collecting the opium. In the north, women's contribution to lancing and collection was generally found to be 40-50%.

In both regions, it was claimed that the latter stages of opium poppy cultivation, including clearing the fields, breaking the capsules and removing the seed, cleaning the seed, and processing the byproducts, were the sole responsibility of the women of the household and that they received little assistance from the men. Typically, respondents in both the north and the east reported that they provided a greater proportion of the labour required for opium poppy cultivation compared to the men of their household.

Respondents in both regions indicated that the most time consuming activities associated with opium poppy cultivation

<sup>12</sup> According to the fieldwork for the Annual Opium Poppy Survey in Afghanistan, the extensive cultivation of opium poppy was first reported and surveyed in the district of Sarobi in 1999, and in the district of Qarghai in 1998. Opium poppy has been reported in Surkhrud district since the Survey began in 1994 and in the district of Sarkani since 1995. For more details, see *Afghanistan Annual Opium Poppy Survey 1999*. UNDCP: Islamabad.

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were weeding and harvesting. Estimates of the number of hours spent weeding per day ranged from 5-9 hours, however, the most common response was 6-7 hours. For those women that were found to both lance opium poppy capsules and collect the opium, harvest time was considered even more time consuming with some respondents working as many as 11 hours per day. For those only involved in the collection of the opium from the capsule, only 4 hours were required.

However, analysis of the results of fieldwork in the north, indicates that lancing is not as widely practiced as other agricultural tasks related to the cultivation of opium poppy. Indeed, whilst 85 % of respondents involved in opium poppy cultivation in the north were found to collect opium gum, only 71% were found to lance the capsules. In the eastern region, this phenomenon was more pronounced with only 31% of those interviewed who cultivated opium poppy, reporting that they lanced the capsules, compared to 78% who reported that they collected the gum. Indeed, a significant number of those interviewed reported that they undertook all the tasks associated with opium poppy cultivation *'except lancing'*

In the east, male informants have suggested that the low level of female involvement during lancing is a consequence of the likelihood that women will fall ill due to the strength of the opium fumes emitted from freshly lanced capsules. Whilst a number of women did complain of the effects of the fumes during lancing, so did a number of men during previous fieldwork. Moreover, it is interesting to note that despite these complaints, almost three quarters of the respondents in the north were found to lance opium poppy.

A more likely explanation to the low level of female participation in the east, would seem to be the timing of the collection and lancing of opium poppy within the region. As previous fieldwork in the east has illustrated, opium poppy tends to be lanced in the afternoon and collected the following morning. Yet, the afternoon is a time when food preparation, child care and the collection of fodder for livestock is undertaken, all of which are activities that are the sole responsibility of the women of the household. Moreover, the extensive use of hired labour in the east during the harvest period would also seem to act as a constraint on women's involvement in lancing. Indeed, less intensive opium poppy cultivation in the north may mitigate the need for hired labour in the north, leading to increased levels of female participation during the lancing stage.

*'Our major problem is that weeding opium poppy takes a lot of time. We have problems carrying the seeds to the field and often get sick while lancing and collecting the opium. It gives you a headache.'*

Female respondent Sarobi district, Kabul

*'When we weed opium we work from morning until near noon, then we come home and prepare lunch and then we go back to the land. In weeding, harvesting and cleaning the seeds of opium poppy we work almost 7 or 8 hours a day as well as undertake our household activities.'*

Female respondent, Faizabad district, Badakhshan



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## 9. The Life Cycle of the Household

Many respondents reported that their involvement in wheat and opium poppy cultivation outside the *qala* was reluctant and was strongly related to the life cycle of the household. For instance, those respondents who were widowed were found to be far more likely to be actively involved in agricultural production outside the family compound, than those whose husbands were still alive. Sickness within the family, particularly amongst elderly husbands, was also a relatively common explanation for women playing a more active role in agricultural production outside the family compound than they would like or the practice of seclusion might dictate.

Similarly, the availability of child labour was also alleged to have an impact on the labour demands on female labour from within the household. Indeed, one respondent complained that the loss of family labour incurred as a direct result of both her daughters marrying and moving to the households of their husband's family had compelled her to work in all stages of wheat cultivation once again. Moreover, a number of respondents, indicated that they welcomed the time when their children would be old enough to work in the fields and that they, as women, would no longer have to undertake agricultural activities outside the family compound.

In this context, it is important to note that in conservative rural areas, such as Afghanistan and the tribal areas of Pakistan, experience has shown that improvements in the socio-economic status of the household have often led to increasing restrictions on the mobility of women.<sup>13</sup> As such, for those households with access to sufficient human or financial capital, the use of male household labour, or the recruitment of itinerant workers or sharecroppers, is considered preferable to the employment of female household labour outside the family compound. This is perhaps more so for opium poppy where, despite its increasingly widespread cultivation, there is still a degree of social stigma associated with opium poppy in Afghanistan.

Yet, it is particularly interesting to note that there is very little correlation between the role of women in opium and wheat cultivation and the extent of household landholdings which has often been taken as a proxy indicator of wealth in rural Afghanistan. For instance, only 7% of those interviewed who were landless were found to be actively involved in the cultivation of opium outside the *qala*, compared to 4.5% of those who owned land. This might suggest that the life cycle of the household and its impact on household labour supply, as well as the practice of seclusion, are more important determinants of the role of women in agricultural production outside the family compound, than landownership *per se*. However, it might also suggest that opium poppy cultivation is such a labour intensive crop that even those families that might be considered relatively more affluent in terms of land ownership, are required to maximise the use

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<sup>13</sup> 'In rural areas confining women to the home is a public statement of the family's ability to replace unpaid family labour with paid, usually male labour, and the seclusion of women increases with their economic and social status' in Shaheed F. (1987) *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back*. London. pp. 18-19. 'The ability to keep women in seclusion and uninvolved in economic activity outside the home is an important index of relative wealth, it also becomes indicative of their social worth, or their honour' in Jeffrey, P. (1981) *Frogs in a Well: Indian Women in Purdah*. Zed Press: London. For details on *purdah* in Afghanistan see Louis Dupree (1973) *Afghanistan*. Oxford University Press: Karachi.



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of available unpaid family labour if they are to achieve sufficient returns on their crop.

*'Our major problem is that our land is close to our house. The men say that we can reach the land easily. Because of this we do not hire labour. If the land were far away, they would hire labour. '*

Female respondent, Jurm district, Badakhshan

*'We don't have any problems because all the agricultural activities are done by the sharecroppers. Women? We stopped working on poppy when we got older because in our village and area it is not good for grown up girls and women to work in the fields'.*

Female respondent, Surkhrud district, Nangarhar

## 10. The Difficulties of Maintaining *Purdah*

Respondents reported that those households with fields located nearer the roadside, or in areas where itinerant labourers were frequently working, were particularly '*honour bound*' to comply with the practice of seclusion due to the '*public*' arena in which they were working.

In the eastern region, a number of women cited the problems of maintaining *purdah* whilst undertaking agricultural activities outside the family compound. Indeed, a number of those interviewed expressed embarrassment at the fact that they were required to work in the fields outside the family compound, in an area where relatives were residing.

One strategy for maintaining *purdah* cited by respondents was to remain low to the ground whilst undertaking agricultural tasks. This was considered particularly difficult for tasks such as reaping wheat or harvesting opium. Another strategy commonly cited was to hide when strangers approached.

A respondent in Qarghai district claimed that those households in the area that interpreted *purdah* particularly strictly insisted that women undertook agricultural activities at night by lantern light. Another respondent in Surkhrud district claimed that she did not face any problems with *purdah* due to the fact that all the household land was contained within the boundaries of the *qala*.

Only one respondent in the north reported that they did not work in the fields due to the '*narrow minded nature*' of the men of the household. However, it is clear that the proximity of household agricultural land to the home was a major determinant of whether the men of the house deemed it appropriate for women to undertake certain agricultural activities, particularly for wheat cultivation. Indeed, it is interesting to note that the mobility of women was a cross cultural issue

impacting upon women from each of the ethnic groups interviewed.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, it is notable that even where the men of the household impose restrictions on the ability of women to work outside the home on crops such as wheat, women are still actively involved in the weeding of opium poppy. For instance, in Surkhrud, one quarter of those interviewed reported that it was deemed inappropriate for them to work ‘*outside the home*’, yet the majority were still involved in the weeding of opium poppy.

*‘In all stages of agricultural activities, women must maintain purdah. They must hide themselves when a man passes the field, particularly those who are strangers. This is a great problem for us. Working on these fields seriously affects our main responsibilities, such as taking care of our children and carrying out household chores. We have a very difficult life.’*

Female respondent Qarghai district, Laghman

*‘Our major problem is to cover our faces whilst we are working in the fields so as to hide ourselves from men. We must sit whilst reaping the wheat or working on other crops. This is a very difficult task.’*

Female respondent Qarghai district, Laghman

## 11. A Preference for Hired and Reciprocal Labour

Both the hiring of labour and reciprocal labour arrangements, were perceived to ease the burden of women’s agricultural work outside the family compound. As such, there was overwhelming support for *ashar* and hiring labour amongst respondents in both the north and east, although the incidence of each was found to differ by region.

In the north, fieldwork revealed that there was much greater emphasis on the use of *ashar* labour, particularly during the weeding and harvesting stages of opium poppy cultivation. For instance, 70% of respondents in the north reported that their



Figure 9: Adolescent itinerant labourer weeding opium poppy in Shinwar district, Nangarhar.

<sup>14</sup> Whilst the code of the Pashtoons, known as *Pashtoonwali*, places considerable restrictions on the movement of women, the mobility of women has also been circumscribed in accordance with the traditions of both the Uzbek and Tadjik communities. Moreover, whilst the *burqa*, is more common in the southern region, it is also in widespread use in the north of Afghanistan. See Peter Marsden (1998) *The Taliban: War, Religion and the New Order in Afghanistan*. Zed Books: London.

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household entered into reciprocal labour arrangements, most of which were with neighbouring households or relatives in nearby villages. Respondents indicated that *ashar* was used in the cultivation of a number of crops although, opium poppy, wheat and barley were given priority. Whilst *ashar* labour was reported to be used to tend to a number of crops at particularly labour intensive period in their cropping cycle, sometimes simultaneously, 60% of those households using *ashar* labour were found to allocate it to opium poppy, compared to almost 50% for wheat, and 18% for barley. All those respondents whose households used *ashar* labour for opium poppy in the north used it during the weeding stage, whilst 87% used it for collection and lancing.

In the eastern region, the use of *ashar* for the collection and lancing of opium poppy was less common with less than 20% of respondents reporting that their household entered into reciprocal labour arrangements for this stage of cultivation. *Ashar* was reported to be used more widely in the weeding of opium with almost 40% of respondents reporting that their household undertook this task on a reciprocal basis. The planting of rice and the reaping of wheat were the other activities that *ashar* labour was typically used for.

Whilst preferential to undertaking the work themselves, many respondents considered their contribution to *ashar* problematic, increasing the intensity of both their domestic and sometimes their agricultural workloads at specific times in the agricultural calendar. Respondents indicated that, generally, those households that entered into reciprocal labour arrangements were required to provide two meals a day during the period when their neighbours worked on their land, thereby increasing the burden of women within the household and reducing their agricultural burden. However, for those women, that were required to reciprocate and assist in the cultivation of their neighbour's crops, their agricultural workload remained relatively constant.

Indeed, whilst the agricultural responsibilities under *ashar* were mainly undertaken by men, women were also found to provide agricultural labour to neighbouring households in both the regions in which fieldwork was conducted. For example, in the eastern region one third of those households that entered into reciprocal labour arrangements exchanged both male and female labour. In the north, the figure was lower, constituting only 13%.

Respondents in the north, also reported that *ashar* arrangements for opium poppy were generally differentiated by gender, with women focusing on the weeding of opium poppy and men on its collection and harvest. It was reported that children also provide their labour as part of *ashar* arrangements for wheat, opium and other crops.

In the eastern region, respondents suggested that there was greater emphasis on the use of hired labour with many of those interviewed reporting that they were '*too busy*' to enter into reciprocal labour arrangements. Indeed, the incidence of hiring labour was found to differ significantly across the regions, with 91% of those interviewed in the east reporting that their households hired labour, compared to only 40% in the northern region. Moreover, in the east, respondents expressed a preference for the use of hired labour over that of *ashar*, due to the fact that hired labourers were often paid in cash and food did not need to be provided.

It is interesting to note that in the eastern region, almost one third of those interviewed reported that their household hired both male and female labourers, whilst in the north there were only three respondents who reported that their household hired female labourers, all of whom were hired to prepare food during the opium poppy harvest.

*'Whenever we are sick, unless we are in a critical condition, we are obliged to prepare food. We have no doctor and medicine in the area. If there is a need to take the patient to the city and it is opium harvest time, we cannot go. As soon as we feel a little better, we start work again.'*

Female respondent, Khash district, Badakhshan

*'Hiring and sharing labour speeds up our agricultural activities but increases our workload at home as we have to prepare food two or three times a day. In addition we have to cook for our family members, clean and wash clothes, take care of the children and look after the animals.'*

Female respondent Sarobi district, Kabul

## 12. The Provision of Food as a Productive Role

The responsibility for the care and maintenance of the household and its members is an enormous burden on women in Afghanistan.<sup>15</sup> Fieldwork revealed that this burden is increased dramatically during harvesting when the household may employ a number of itinerant labourers, many of whom are fed as many as three times a day as part of their payment for work.

In Afghanistan the provision of payments in-kind, such as agricultural commodities, food, accommodation, and, in some cases, clothing, are essential for improving access to labour, particularly during busy periods in the agricultural calendar.<sup>16</sup> Within this context, women's role in the provision of food is very much a productive one, generating the necessary payments in-kind for the purchase of the labour that is essential to the realisation of agricultural production.

As would be expected, under reciprocal labour arrangements, the provision of food was found to be uniform, as typically no other payment is made. However, for hired labour arrangements, the provision of food was found to differ both between and within regions. For instance, in the

<sup>15</sup> In the tribal areas of Pakistan, Grima reported that the general household chores of women included 'sweeping the entire house and verandahs several times a day (because trash and refuse is thrown there until it is swept), filling water pots and urns for the day's supply, making fires, preparing meals from scratch and cooking them over a kerosene or wood fire, preparing dough and making bread twice a day, milking goats or cows and preparing dairy products, heating water for dishes and laundry, cleaning dirty children, nursing infants, entertaining guests, and performing prayers'. For more details see Benedicte Grima (1992) *The Performance of Emotion among Paxtun Women: 'The Misfortunes Which have Befallen Me'* University of Texas Press: Austin.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, in southern Afghanistan, itinerant opium poppy harvesters were found to receive a share of the final crop as payment for their work, as well as, transportation to the land from the district center and three good quality meals per day. For more details, see *Strategic Study 4: Access to Labour: The Role of Opium Poppy in the Livelihood Strategies of Itinerant Harvesters Working in Helmand Province, Afghanistan*. UNDCP: Islamabad.

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north there was a general consensus that food was provided for itinerant labourers for both the opium poppy and wheat harvest. Indeed, cooking for household, reciprocal and hired labour working during the wheat harvest was cited as the most time consuming activity that women undertook in relation to wheat cultivation.

However, in the eastern region the provision of food for hired labourers during the harvest of opium poppy was less commonplace with 55% of respondents reporting that hired labour only received a cash payment of between \$1.25 and \$2.5 per day. Yet, the provision of food was found to vary between the four districts, with only 7% of respondents in Sarkani, 46% of respondents in Surkhrud, and all of those interviewed in Sarobi and Qarghai, providing food to itinerant labourers during the opium poppy harvest.

Respondents reported that food provision alone could require as much as 8 hours per day during the wheat and opium poppy harvest. In the north respondents indicated that food provision during the wheat harvest could be more time consuming than that for opium poppy due to the fact that the food had to be carried to the fields at lunchtime. A number of those interviewed claimed that their wheat fields were up to one hours walk, whilst their opium poppy fields were located in close proximity to the *qala*.

It was reported that the burden that food preparation imposed on the women of the household was often exacerbated by the loss of assistance from other family members who find themselves drafted into agricultural activities during the harvesting season. Indeed, in the north there was a general consensus that the extra burden imposed on women during the harvest season due to the need to prepare food for itinerant harvesters, as well as attend to their own agricultural duties, was to the detriment of personal and family health care. Many of those interviewed claimed that during the opium poppy harvest in particular incidences of illness within the household or amongst the extended family could not be attended to properly due to excessive demands on their labour.

For those respondents in the east who did not provide food for hired labour, the employment of itinerant labourers during the wheat and opium harvest was seen as a major benefit, allowing them to focus on what they reported were preferable activities, including childcare and the maintenance of the household.

*'Our field activities are reduced but more effort is required to prepare food. We just prepare food and forget our children, and the condition of our home. Even when we get sick we cannot attend a doctor. Whatever the circumstances we must prepare food.'*

Female respondent Sarobi district, Kabul

*'Preparing food for the labourers has a great impact on women's other activities, such as cooking, washing, and taking care of the children. We can't look after our animals because we are so busy. Also if something happens in one of our neighbours households we can't go and see them.'*

Female respondent Sarobi district, Kabul

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### 13. Women's Role in Animal Husbandry

Animals have proven to be an essential part of livelihood strategies in Afghanistan, providing access to food, cash income, and a number of byproducts with a high use value. Animal waste has also proven vital to maintaining soil fertility and provided an important source of household fuel. Moreover, during periods of growing food insecurity the consumption and sale of livestock has been an important coping strategy for more vulnerable households.

Almost 85% of those women interviewed in the north and 81% of respondents in the east were actively involved in animal husbandry. Indeed, the majority of respondents reported that they were responsible for tending livestock as well as processing dairy products and meat byproducts, such as skins and wools. Processing animal waste into fuel was also cited by the majority of respondents as an activity for which they, as women, were solely responsible.

In the north, respondents reported that women were responsible for tending to a number of different livestock including, chicken, sheep, goats, cows and oxen. In the eastern region, there was an even greater variety of livestock that women tended to, including chickens, turkeys, sheep, goats, cows, oxen, camels, horses and donkeys. Indeed, in the district of Sarkani, in Kunar province, close to the international border, one respondent reported that their household leased horses and donkeys to those who wished to transport goods across the Afghanistan/Pakistan border.

In the eastern region, it was reported that a number of those interviewed were involved in a traditional reciprocal livestock system known as *Pendoochi*. Under this system one household agrees to provide a newly born calf to another, often neighbouring, household. Once the calf has matured and sired its own calf, the newly born calf is returned to the owner of the original calf. This system was seen as providing a valuable contribution to household assets.

Previous fieldwork revealed that the processing of dairy products has proven to be an importance source of household income in the district of Surkhrud.<sup>17</sup> This was verified during the fieldwork for this *Study* which indicates that the sale of yoghurt, curd, and cheese were seen as particularly profitable activities by respondents, particularly in Surkhrud, and Qarghai due to their proximity to the city of Jalalabad. Moreover, in the districts of Qarghai, Sarkani and Surkhrud a number of respondents reported that they were already raising hatchlings, lambs, and calves to be sold at the market when they reached maturity. Indeed, in the eastern region, a significant number of respondents indicated that they would prefer to dedicate more of their time to animal husbandry due to the high use-value and exchange-value of the products.

Typically, those that were not involved in animal husbandry in both the north and east claimed that they did not own any livestock due to poverty and a general shortage of grazing land. For instance, a number of respondents in the north reported that the lack of grazing land and water for cultivating fodder crops, such as clover, were the major constraints on animal husbandry.

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<sup>17</sup> See David Mansfield (1997) *Strategy for the Implementation of the Poppy Crop Reduction Project (C28), Afghanistan Programme 1997-2000*. UNDCP/ROSWA Islamabad, August 1997.

## 14. Women's Attitude Towards Opium Poppy Cultivation

Three quarters of those interviewed in the north indicated that they supported the decision to cultivate opium poppy. Only 5% of respondents in the north viewed opium poppy cultivation as negative, whilst a further 20% were indifferent, or had no opinion at all as *'women have no word on opium poppy cultivation'* or *'the decision belongs to men'*. The few who had negative views about opium poppy reported that they would still cultivate it despite the tragic consequences opium had had on their family (see Box on next page).



**Figure 10:** Opium stored in a plastic bowl by the side of the field during the harvest in Faizabad district, Badakhshan.

In the eastern region, only 13% of those interviewed expressed a negative opinion regarding the cultivation of opium poppy. Most indicated that they thought opium poppy was forbidden, or *haram*, others expressed the view that it was particularly hard work that they would prefer to avoid. It is particularly interesting to note that a number of respondents in Sarobi referred to the risk that their sons might become addicted to opium if they continued to cultivate it, but claimed they had few other economic options.

Indeed, in both the eastern and northern regions a number of respondents indicated that it was long term debts, incurred for either health reasons or as a consequence of crop losses, that had initially prompted them to cultivate opium poppy. According to those interviewed, opium poppy was one of the only possible sources of cash income with which to repay their existing debts, and in some cases, the only means by which to regain the use of their land after it had been subsequently leased to tenants during periods of increasing hardship.

There was an overwhelming consensus in both the eastern region and the north that, whilst women preferred the household to cultivate opium poppy, they did not wish to be actively involved in its cultivation themselves. Indeed, in the eastern region, the weeding of opium poppy was often singled out as a particularly arduous activity that respondents were willing to forego should the opportunity arise. The harvest of both opium poppy and wheat were also activities that the majority of women wished to avoid, preferring to focus their work within the household compound and out of the intense sunshine common during the winter harvest season in Afghanistan.

In the eastern region, respondents expressed a preference for non-farm income opportunities, including making earthenware pots, embroidery, basket weaving and tailoring. On-farm income opportunities, including the cultivation of vegetable crops such as cucumber, onion and sugar cane, as well as poultry, were also cited as preferential to opium poppy cultivation. However, the

distance to local markets was reported to be a major constraint by respondents, as well as insufficient financial resources to fund new economic activities, and an acute shortage of time due to the burden of their productive and reproductive roles.

*'Now I am 31 years old and I have stopped working on opium poppy cultivation. I think opium is my enemy. Because of opium I lost my 3 year old son. I was putting opium in a dish whilst I was harvesting. My son was eating the opium. I did not realise. When I did realise he was dead. I only had one son. Until my death I will never forget this. I am against opium poppy cultivation. When I think of opium my legs and hands shake.'*

Female respondent, Faizabad district, Badakhshan

*'Opium poppy is a good source of income and trading. It is a way of livelihood. Opium is sold at a high price. Oil is made from its seeds. Its capsules are used to treat coughs. Its stalks are fuel and its ashes soap. Its waste is fodder for animals. Therefore it is more beneficial than any other crops. Poppy should always be cultivated.'*

Female respondent, Darayem district, Badakhshan

## 15. Findings

- **Women play a fundamental role in the cultivation of opium poppy in the northern and eastern regions of Afghanistan.** Respondents in both regions reported that they were involved in a number of stages of opium poppy cultivation, including: planting, weeding; thinning; lancing the capsules; collecting the opium; clearing the fields; breaking the capsules and removing the seed; cleaning the seed; and processing byproducts such as oil and soap. The preparation of food for hired or reciprocal labour was also cited by a significant number of respondents when discussing their role in opium poppy cultivation. Indeed, in both regions there was a general consensus that women provided the bulk of the labour at each stage of opium poppy cultivation, except its harvest.
- **Opium poppy is a labour intensive crop and as such households seek to utilise a variety of different social mechanisms by which to access low cost labour.** Priority would appear to be given to utilising household labour, including women and children. Indeed, almost all those interviewed worked on opium poppy outside the family compound, even where the tradition of *purdah* precluded their involvement in the cultivation of other crops outside the confines of the home. Reciprocal labour arrangements also allowed households to access low cost labour, mainly from neighbouring households or villages. Whilst *ashar* labour was used on a variety of crops, opium poppy featured most prominently as the crop that reciprocal labour was allocated to. Women and children were found to provide *ashar* labour for neighbouring households.



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- **The role of women in agricultural production is largely determined by the life cycle of the household, the location of household fields, and other reproductive and productive tasks that women undertake during the agricultural year.** The availability of sufficient labour within the household can often mean that women are not required to work outside the family compound, cultivating either opium poppy or wheat. However, a woman whose husband is sick, a widow, or a woman with young children, or married daughters, will often be required to assist with the cultivation of opium poppy due to the labour intensive nature of the crop. In the north, the location of rainfed wheat crops some distance from the household generally mitigates against the use of female labour due to the practice of *purdah* and the reproductive role of women within the household.
  - **The scale and nature of women's involvement in opium poppy cultivation can differ both between and within areas in accordance with the practice of *purdah*.** For instance, in the north women were generally found to be more involved in the harvesting, in particular the lancing, of opium poppy than in the east where there was a greater reliance on the use of hired labour. Yet, in both regions, there were villages where women's participation in agricultural production was constrained by the practice of *purdah*. Respondents reported that those households with fields located nearer the roadside, or in areas where itinerant labourers were frequently working, were particularly '*honour bound*' to comply with the practice of seclusion due to the '*public*' arena in which they were working. In those households that had sufficient male or child labour, the role of women in opium poppy cultivation was generally limited to the breaking of capsules, the cleaning of seeds and the processing of the byproducts, with some weeding, if required. However, for those households with limited human and financial capacity, women were required to work in all the stages of opium poppy cultivation, including lancing, and the collection of opium.
  - **In the north, the preference for cultivating opium poppy on irrigated land, located near the family compound, means that women's involvement in its cultivation is often considered more appropriate both to the rules of *purdah* and their reproductive responsibilities, than their work on other rainfed crops, such as wheat.** Indeed, 95% of those women interviewed in the north reported that they were actively involved in the cultivation of opium poppy outside the confines of the *qala*, whilst only 13% reported that they cultivated wheat outside the family compound. The situation in the east suggests that there is less gender differentiation in the cultivation of winter crops, with 93% of respondents reporting that they are actively involved in the cultivation of wheat outside the *qala*, and 97% reporting that they cultivated opium poppy outside the confines of the family compound. According to the reports of key informants and respondents themselves, the distinguishing factor is the predominance of rainfed land in the north, on which wheat tends to be cultivated, and its distance from the *qala*.
  - **Whilst the hiring of labour and reciprocal labour arrangements releases women from many of their agricultural responsibilities in opium poppy and wheat cultivation, their domestic burden is increased considerably by the need to provide**

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**food to labourers as a payments in-kind.** The provision of two meals for *ashar* labour was considered standard practice by respondents, resulting in an increase in the domestic burden of women. This was often exacerbated by the loss of assistance from other family members who also found themselves drafted into agricultural activities during the harvest season. Hiring labour was considered particularly labour intensive for women given that three meals were typically provided, except for some areas in the eastern region. There was a general consensus that the extra burden imposed on women during the harvest season due to the need to prepare food for itinerant harvesters, as well as attend to their own agricultural duties, was to the detriment of personal and family health care. Whilst, for those respondents in the east who did not provide food for hired labour, the employment of itinerant labourers during the wheat and opium harvest was seen as a major benefit, allowing them to focus on what they reported were preferable activities, including childcare and the maintenance of the household.

- **Women would appear to play a leading role in animal husbandry and as such make an important contribution to both household cash income and assets.** Animals play an integral role in household livelihood strategies in Afghanistan, providing food, cash income and a number of byproducts with a high use value. Respondents indicated that the majority of tasks associated with animal husbandry were the sole responsibility of the women of the household, including feeding and tending livestock, processing dairy products and meat byproducts, and converting animal waste into fuel. As such, interventions aimed at improving productivity in the livestock sector and the value added of dairy and meat byproducts, may serve to increase the opportunity cost of women's labour and reduce their availability for opium poppy cultivation.
- **Generally, women would appear to have limited decision-making powers over household cropping patterns despite their active involvement in agricultural production.** Indeed, even where the male members of the household were either absent or dead, younger male relatives or even agricultural employees were found to have more decision-making powers over household cropping patterns than the female members of the household.
- **The cultivation of opium poppy is considered long and arduous work by most of the women interviewed.** As such, many respondents indicated that they would welcome the opportunity to undertake alternative tasks were they not required to work on opium poppy. Weeding was considered a particularly difficult task, requiring as much as 8 hours per day. The lancing of opium capsules was also identified as a stage of cultivation at which many women would prefer not to be involved, citing long days, subsequent sickness, and the loss of time for child care and household chores, as negative consequences of their participation. Food preparation for itinerant harvesters or reciprocal labour, during the opium poppy harvest was also reported to increase the domestic burden of women, which was further exacerbated for those women who were also required to participate in the harvest itself.

- **Whilst there is a recognition that opium poppy cultivation does not conform with religious mores and that it represents a potential threat to household health, the majority of women interviewed believed there are few alternatives that can currently satisfy the multi-functional role that opium poppy plays in household livelihood strategies in Afghanistan.** Opium poppy currently provides access to credit, cash income, land and labour. It has a number of byproducts that have both a use and exchange value, including oil, soap and stalks for winter fuel. Opium itself is a high value – low weight, non-perishable product that has an almost guaranteed market in-country. Whilst not necessarily the most profitable crop due to the labour intensive nature of cultivation, considerable fluctuations in its price, and the tendency to sell the crop on an advance basis, particularly amongst the resource poor, opium poppy is a low cost crop in a high risk environment. As such, opium poppy has an integral role in the complex livelihood strategies that households currently pursue in rural Afghanistan, which both women and men recognise and generally support.
- **A failure to develop alternative on farm, off farm or non-farm income opportunities for women will raise the risks that households associate with alternative development interventions in Afghanistan.** The current absence of alternative income opportunities that are considered culturally appropriate and, in the current economic climate of Afghanistan, have higher returns, means that women's labour is perceived to have a low opportunity cost. This makes labour intensive crops like opium poppy more attractive to the household. Efforts need to be made to raise the opportunity cost of women's labour if alternative development interventions are to achieve their objectives without acting to the detriment of women's economic and social standing within the household.

## 16. Recommendations

- **If both alternative and conventional development objectives are to be achieved, there is a need to mainstream a gender perspective into development interventions aimed at reducing opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. Indeed, a failure to address the needs of women as both economic and social actors within the household will raise the risks that households associate with alternative development interventions, prompting households to adopt a number of coping strategies in response to alternative development interventions, including possible relocation on a short term or long term basis.**
- **Gender analysis should be undertaken at each stage of the project cycle. Without a clear understanding of how productive, reproductive and community roles are differentiated by gender, project interventions can at best prove ineffective, and at worst prove counter-productive. Ongoing impact monitoring data, disaggregated by both gender and socio-economic status, is an essential tool for both project management and the evolution of project strategy. Moreover, as previous strategic**

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studies have illustrated, a failure to address the needs and the concerns of the most vulnerable members of the community may be to the detriment of both conventional and alternative development objectives.

- Recognising the paucity of information on gender roles in southern Afghanistan, a comprehensive gender analysis needs to be undertaken as a matter of priority under the auspices of the Helmand Initiative. This should be undertaken as part of a broader framework of stakeholder analysis and should be conducted prior to the implementation of programme activities. The timing and mode of implementation for this analysis needs to be discussed between the members of the Helmand Planning Group and the UN Gender Adviser.
- Animal husbandry is an important economic activity in Afghanistan in which women have almost sole responsibility within the household. Whilst the restrictions on the mobility of women have imposed constraints, efforts by FAO Livestock have illustrated that it is possible to address the practical and strategic needs of women through interventions in the livestock sector. Greater efforts should be made by UNDCP to explore the potential for closer partnership with FAO Livestock as a means of raising the opportunity cost of women's labour.
- Greater consideration should be given to supporting community-based-childcare arrangements that could address the practical needs of women, particularly during busy periods in the agricultural calendar.
- There is a need to raise the social cost that households associate with opium poppy cultivation. Problem drug use is a growing problem amongst men and women in both rural and urban Afghanistan, as well as the Afghan community in Pakistan and Iran.<sup>18</sup> More needs to be done to incorporate information regarding problem drug use within the Afghan community into alternative development initiatives in Afghanistan. Women seem to be particularly aware that opium poppy cultivation does not conform with religious mores and that it represents a potential threat to household health and, given improving socio-economic conditions, may be able to act as 'agents of change' within the household. Indeed, whilst women would not appear to have explicit decision making powers over household cropping patterns, they undoubtedly have influence over the men of the household given their role in biological and social reproduction, as well as important sources of agricultural and domestic labour. Existing initiatives, including micro-enterprise development, health education and horticulture, might all serve as vehicles by which to raise women's awareness of the long term social costs opium cultivation will exact on the Afghan community.

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<sup>18</sup> For more details on the issue of problem drug use in Afghanistan and the Afghan community in Pakistan, see the Community Profile Series produced by the Demand Reduction Project of the current UNDCP Afghanistan Programme in Islamabad.

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## ANNEX A: TERMS OF REFERENCE

### Strategic Study 6: The Role of Women in Opium Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan.

**Objective:** To further UNDCP's understanding of the role of women in opium poppy cultivation and the consequences arising from its replacement for women's economic and social standing.

**Summary:** Due to the labour intensive nature of opium poppy cultivation, access to unpaid family labour would appear to be integral to minimizing production costs. Consequently, households have been found to adopt a number of strategies to minimise the labour costs of opium poppy cultivation, including staggered planting, sharecropping arrangements, and the use of female and child labour.

In the eastern region, women would appear to be actively involved in opium poppy cultivation both at the weeding stage and during the harvest. In the south, there is less evidence of women playing a productive role in opium poppy cultivation outside the family compound, but they do play a key role in the provision of food as a payment in kind for itinerant labourers during the harvest season. In the north, currently little is known about the role of women in opium poppy cultivation although initial assessments suggest that they are more actively involved in all stages of cultivation compared to women in the eastern and southern regions.

The *Study* will use informal interviews with women from a number of districts to ascertain the role of women in opium poppy cultivation. It will explore the relationship between vulnerability and women's involvement in opium poppy cultivation. The *Study* will ascertain how women's influence on household decision-making might be best utilised to increase the social costs associated with opium poppy cultivation. It will seek to identify strategic niches by which women's practical and strategic needs can be addressed.

**Methodology:** The initial fieldwork for the *Study* will be undertaken in the northern area due to improved access to female respondents. Further fieldwork will be conducted in the eastern region if security and access permits.

Initially, the *Study* will conduct 15 interviews with women in each of the 7 districts to be identified by the Study Team Leader during his mission to Badakhshan in June 1999. **Female respondents** will be selected over a wide geographical area within each of the districts in order to verify findings as well as identify local and generic trends. A further 4 districts in the east will be identified as possible sites for fieldwork once the results of the fieldwork from the north are reviewed. **It is important that these interviews are conducted with women from households that cultivate opium poppy.**

Due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter, emphasis should be given to informal interviews. A questionnaire should **not** be used. Instead the interviewer should focus on a number of key issues discussed in a conversational manner. Notes should **not** be taken during the

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interview but should be written up once the interview has finished and the interviewer has departed. Any issues that are not addressed in the Terms of Reference but are raised in the interview by the respondent should also be documented.

Emphasis should be given to conducting in-depth interviews over a wide geographical area in order to identify generic issues that could be explored during subsequent stages of the *Study*.

**Timetable:** During the initial days of the monitoring of the Annual Opium Poppy Survey, the Study Team Leader will identify husband and wife teams to conduct the interviews and provide training accordingly. During the monitoring of the survey the Study Team Leader will also review the work of the teams and debrief them at the end of his mission. The Study Team Leader will provide a translation of each of the interviews and an overview of the findings from each district.

**Report:** The final report will draw together past and current work that has been conducted by C27 on the dynamics of the labour market, including the Socio-Economic Baseline Survey, former Strategic Studies and current fieldwork assessing the labour inputs required for opium poppy cultivation in the target districts.

## **KEY ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED**

### **A. Landownership**

- i. What is their ethnic group?
- ii. How much land does the family own?
- iii. What winter crops do they grow on their land?
- iv. Who decides what crops are grown on the land owned by the household?
- v. How much land does the family sharecrop or lease?
- vi. Who decides what crops are grown on sharecropped or leased land?
- vii. What is the cost of sharecropping or leasing land?

### **B. Productive Role**

- i. What agricultural activities, including animal husbandry, do women undertake?
- ii. What agricultural activities, including animal husbandry, are solely undertaken by women?
- iii. What are the major problems that they face in their agricultural activities, including animal husbandry?
- iv. What is their role in wheat cultivation?
- v. What proportion of the labour do they undertake in each of the stages of wheat cultivation?

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- vi. How many hours per day would they work on the wheat crop during each of these stages?
  - vii. At what age did they first start working on wheat cultivation?
  - viii. If they have stopped working on the wheat crop, at which age, and why?
  - ix. What is their role in opium poppy cultivation?
  - x. What proportion of the labour do they undertake in each of the stages of opium poppy cultivation?
  - xi. How many hours per day would they work on the opium poppy crop during each of these stages?
  - xii. At what age did they first start working on opium poppy cultivation?
  - xiii. If they have stopped working on opium poppy, at which age, and why?

### **C. Impact of Hired/Shared Labour**

- i. Does the household hire labour? How many? Male? Female?
- ii. Does the household share labour with other households? How many? Male? Female?
- iii. What crops do they hire for?
- iv. At what stage in their cultivation?
- v. What crops do they share for?
- vi. At what stage in their cultivation?
- vii. What are the consequences of hiring or sharing labour for the workload of women?
- viii. Is food provided for hired or shared labour?
- ix. How many hours per day are spent preparing food for hired or shared labourers?
- x. For how many days?
- xi. What other activities that women undertake does this have an impact on?

### **D. Perceptions**

- i. What are their views on the current choice of crops cultivated?
- ii. Are their alternatives that they would prefer to cultivate?
- iii. Are their alternative agricultural activities or non-agricultural activities that they would prefer to undertake?
- iv. What are their reasons for preferring these alternatives?
- v. What are the constraints they face in undertaking these activities?
- vi. What are their views on opium poppy cultivation?

*'If I tell the truth, I do not have positive views on opium. It is dangerous and it has an intolerable smell. However, we are landowners and we have lots of problems.'*

Female respondent, Faizabad district, Badakhshan

*'People are saying that poppy is banned this year. We are saying, first they should kill us, because if it is forbidden, we have to leave our houses and go elsewhere. We don't have any source of income other than poppy.'*

Female respondent, Khash district, Badakhshan

*'The amount of labour that is required differs for each stage. With opium cultivation we weed the fields many times. Harvesting opium takes a great deal of time. The more opium cultivated the more the work. As the season for the opium harvest is short, there is the need for a lot of labour at this stage.'*

Female respondent Sarobi district, Kabul

*'Which problem should I tell you about. We don't have water so we can't grow vegetables. For watering the trees we have to fetch water from far away. Believe me I have cried so much because of the problem fetching water. Our land is very far away and it is so difficult to take food there. To tell you the truth we can't afford to hire labour so we do much of the work ourselves. I cannot tell you all the problems that we face.'*

Female respondent, Faizabad district, Badakhshan

*'My daughter has had an operation for which we borrowed 15 million Afghanis. If we cannot produce opium to repay the loan, what shall we do?'*

Female respondent, Khash district, Badakhshan

*'We have not been provided any assistance. Why have the people of Baharak received plenty. The armed men received assistance whilst the poor were neglected.'*

Female respondent, Khash district, Badakhshan

*'During the collection of opium we reach a stage where we cannot even see the capsules. We really get very tired. This condition is mainly in the early days of collection, we get better later on as we get more used to it.'*

Female respondent, Surkhrud district, Nangarhar

*'The cultivation of opium poppy is very hard but because of its good production we want to grow it. I know that it is also likely that one day my husband or my son will become addicted to opium which will cost my family its health and perhaps a life, but in order to solve our current economic problems we are obliged to cultivate opium poppy.'*

Female respondent Sarobi district, Kabul

*'In spite of knowing that the cultivation of poppy is prohibited in islam, we prefer it. We are not the only family to cultivate poppy, all the people in the area grow poppy.'*

Female respondent, Sarkani district, Kunar



