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**The role of social resources in  
securing life and livelihood in  
rural Afghanistan**

Paula Kantor  
and  
Adam Pain

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# THE ROLE OF SOCIAL RESOURCES IN SECURING LIFE AND LIVELIHOOD IN RURAL AFGHANISTAN

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*Paula Kantor and Adam Pain, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit*

**Bath Papers in International Development no. 12**

**January, 2011**

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# The role of social resources in securing life and livelihood in rural Afghanistan

Paula Kantor and Adam Pain

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# **The role of social resources in securing life and livelihood in rural Afghanistan**

**Paula Kantor and Adam Pain**

## **Abstract**

This paper examines how rural Afghan households in five villages located in Badakhshan and Kandahar provinces have negotiated within contexts of weak formal institutions and localized power to achieve physical and economic security. The paper uses household case studies to assess how the concepts of informal security regimes and dependent security aid understanding of the means through which rural households in Afghanistan seek security. It particularly examines how different households' are integrated into social relationships, the variable quality and usefulness of these relationships, and under what conditions they might facilitate autonomous versus dependent security. In doing so the paper explores the importance of context, linking the details of household experiences to their village and provincial locations. It provides an understanding of opportunities for and constraints to rural transformation in Afghanistan based on the social hierarchies and relations present, illustrating the complexities with which interventions aimed at improving human security and reducing poverty must engage, interventions which to date have focused more on filling gaps in access to human and material resources than on addressing the root causes of poverty.

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## 1 Introduction

The Afghanistan state building project is faltering. Transitions to security, a political settlement, institution building, and equitable socio-economic development have not been achieved and conditions in Afghanistan are worsening. There are varied reasons for this state of affairs, including the limitations of the original Bonn agreement, the confounding of a war on terror with a state building project, the creation of a rentier state through excessive aid, divergence between the Afghan reality of personality-driven 'state building' and the institutionalized vision desired by international actors, and the tendency to abstract from politics and approach Afghanistan's challenges from a technical perspective (Suhrke, 2006, Goodhand & Sedra, 2007; Forsberg 2010; Kantor 2010). A *de jure* state may have been re-formed with the trappings of democracy, but in effect informal power relations dominate and are diffused through complex patronage networks which often benefit the few (Forsberg 2010). National and international actors have continued in the post 2001 period to support a variable pattern of localised non-state regimes.

This paper examines how rural households in five villages across two provinces have negotiated within contexts of weak formal institutions and localized power to achieve some measure of physical and economic security.<sup>1</sup> It specifically looks at the role of social relationships within household livelihoods given both the long term importance of these relationships in the Afghan context through its decades of conflict when states and markets were weak to non-existent, and their continued importance in the face of the permeability of interests within formal institutions in post 2001 Afghanistan. The paper uses household case studies to assess how the concepts of informal security regimes and dependent security (Wood 2003, 2004, 2007; Wood and Newton 2005; Wood and Gough 2006) aid understanding of the means through which rural poor households in Afghanistan seek security. Within this, it particularly examines how different households' are integrated into social relationships, the variable quality and usefulness of these relationships, and under what conditions they might facilitate autonomous versus dependent security. In doing so the paper explores the importance of context, linking the details of household experiences to their village and provincial locations. It provides an understanding of opportunities for and constraints to rural transformation in Afghanistan based on the social hierarchies and relations present, illustrating the complexities with which action aimed at improving human security and reducing poverty must engage, action which to date has focused more on filling gaps in access to human and material resources than on addressing the root causes of poverty.

The next section draws on the literature on informal security regimes and relational views of poverty to provide the conceptual foundation for the paper. This is followed by a summary of the methods used in the study and a presentation of the empirical material illustrating the diverse roles of social relationships in the five study villages. Finally the data are discussed in relation to the literature to illustrate the constraints and opportunities to facilitate rural change and poverty reduction in Afghanistan, against recent efforts to do so.

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<sup>1</sup> ESRC-DFID grant, RES-167-25-0285

## 2 Seeking security: The role of relationships

Insecurity in Afghanistan comes from multiple overlapping sources. There is of course the growing physical insecurity linked to insurgency which shapes day to day life for many. The expanding insurgency is linked in part to a weak state unwilling or unable to deliver basic needs or economic opportunities to its citizens and citizen perceptions and experiences of corruption (Gardizi et al 2010; Ladbury 2009). The continuing gap between formal state structures and people, and peoples' growing sense of officials' use of patronage relations for personal political and material gain mean the legitimacy of the state is low. Traditional structures, often at community level, are perceived as more legitimate though they too can act in favour of the few and maintain existing social hierarchies (UNDP 2004; Gardizi et al 2010; Thier 2009).

Livelihood insecurity is another constant feature of life for the majority of Afghans outside the networks of patronage delivering high paid contracts and political positions, and buffeted by policy decisions at times oriented to outside political interests, such as those around reducing opium poppy cultivation. Markets are perceived as highly risky, controlled by people in power (UNDP 2004; Lister & Pain 2004, Flaming & Roe 2009; Shaw 2010); remoteness, climatic shocks, lack of investment in or equitable access to basic services, landlessness and dependence, gender norms and lack of influence all stymie efforts to make a living (UNDP 2004; Flaming and Roe 2009; Kantor 2010). 'Many consequently depend on the precarious support of other people, including those providing humanitarian aid' (UNDP 2004: 55). This may foster dependence on a new range of aid actors or reliance on access to forms of support, such as credit or cash for work, which may aid survival today but do little in the face of the structural risks to be overcome.

These characteristics of life in Afghanistan illustrate the potential of the informal security regime concept (Wood 2004; Wood and Gough 2006), or its recent evolution to wellbeing regimes (Wood and Newton 2005; Wood 2007), to inform analysis of poverty and inequality in Afghanistan. The latter concept, with its more explicit acknowledgement of political instability and role of non-state actors in supporting the achievement of security and well being seems particularly suited to the Afghanistan case (Wood and Newton 2005). These concepts highlight the inability of the poor to turn to institutions of the state and market to find security given the likelihood of self interest outweighing public interest, and of elite capture of markets making the state less willing or able to regulate them in the interests of the poor. This means relationships in the community and family take central roles. The key issues to explore conceptually and empirically then become the quality of these relationships, how well they can deliver security and for whom, and what might need to be compromised in this process.

According to Wood, seeking security is about finding ways to increase predictability (2003, 2004, 2007). The central question then becomes, what are the sources of unpredictability to be countered? Answers to this question influence how one theorises the search for security and the interventions needed to support it. While some identify random sources of risk such as ill health or floods as those that need guarding against (Holzmann and Jorgensen 1999, Dercon 2006), others take a broader view of risk to include chronic or structural forms which drive the persistence of poverty (Wood 2003, Mosse 2007, Cleaver 2005). These are embedded in the way institutions and social relations function and therefore need more than efforts to fill gaps in human or material resources to remedy their effects.

Those taking a structural approach to risk and insecurity identify institutional reform through political struggle as the means to create a system less inimical to the poor and less powerful (Cleaver 2005, Wood 2004, Hickey & du Toit 2007). Such reform would increase the control and agency of the poor (Wood 2007). However, the barriers to such action are high among the poor for a range of reasons, from the potential for competition for resources among those with less reducing their solidarity to the fear of losing what one has within the current system by acting against it or fear of retribution for any such action (du Toit 2004, Wood 2003, 2007).

The latter fears are considered particularly strong barriers to action due to the need for the poor to invest in the existing system in order to achieve some measure of security in the present. One expected effect of insecurity among the poor is to move their focus to ensuring security for the present, over valuing longer term investments in future security (Wood 2003, 2004, 2007; Mosse 2007; Hickey & du Toit 2007). While there is some debate over the extent of choice involved in this privileging of the present over the future (Hickey & Du Toit 2007), there is more agreement around the role of social relationships in providing security today. However, much of this focus is on the role of hierarchical relationships relative to those of reciprocity more likely to be characterized by equality.

Given the time and risks involved in seeking to change the existing system, the agency of the poor is thought to focus on negotiating within it, particularly in relation to establishing and maintaining relationships with those who have more scope to deliver immediate benefits – from employment to housing to credit (Mosse 2007; Cleaver 2005; Hickey & du Toit 2007; Wood 2004). The privileging of social relationships reflects the reliance on community and family resources in many contexts, given the uncertain and unequal access to institutions of the state and market. Such privileging fits the Afghan context where mutual support mechanisms and traditional structures have over the decades of conflict as well as in the post 2001 period been those more likely to provide some measure of security (UNDP 2004, GoA 2008). Social relationships appear to be valued both as ends in themselves – to signal belonging and hence qualification for support, and as means through which to access other resources of interest (Bebbington 1999; Copestake 2007, White & Ellison 2007). In fact past research by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) has illustrated the actions taken by households to strengthen or maintain these relationships, from returnee households conforming to social practices such as limits on female mobility to maintain family relationships (Saito 2009) to borrowing microcredit to pass on to others in order to cement reciprocal or hierarchical relations (Kantor 2009).

The primacy of securing the present necessitates engaging within existing institutional structures and relations. For the poor, this is thought to bring a negative mix of political exclusion (little influence or voice) and economic and social inclusion under adverse terms (Wood 2003, 2004, 2007; Mosse 2007). Hence security through social relationships comes at a cost – dependence within clientelist relationships. These relationships of inequality limit the poor's scope for agency, apart from action within the system to strengthen their position and belonging, also identified more generally as the social compliance required to demonstrate continued worthiness as clients (Cleaver 2005; Harriss-White 2005; Wood 2003). These compromises perpetuate the system's inequities, illustrating a relational view of poverty where some – those with resources and autonomy – gain from the dependence of the poor (Mosse 2007) and both groups are not positioned to change this.

While it might be easy to conclude that dependent forms of security are all negative, it is important to remember what they can deliver, that there will be different levels of dependence within the relationships depending on the parties involved – who they are and the diversity and level of their social and material resources. Therefore rapid removal of these relationships may do more harm than good (Hickey & du Toit 2007). Variation in actors' abilities to negotiate their terms of inclusion in relationships will lead to diverse placements along a continuum of dependent security, with different associated outcomes. Such diversity may allow for different options for exit, more or less voice, and different commitments to loyalty. While some of these opportunities may be individual versus collective, leaving the system unchanged, use of patronage among those in positions of authority may deliver wider benefits, depending on the extent to which social good outweighs personal aims. Hence, more conceptual options describing terms of inclusion and exclusion and their outcomes, such as the framework Kabeer developed to incorporate those who are included on their own terms, others on adverse terms, those who exclude themselves through choice, and others who are excluded and hence made destitute (2000), is useful. This paper seeks to identify this diversity of dependence across select village contexts and household cases to understand the types and quality of social resources in rural Afghanistan, how they are used and useful, and under what conditions some might escape dependence, individually or collectively. Before moving onto to this empirical material, it is important to say a few words about reciprocity.

The literature developing a relational and institutional conceptualisation of risk and poverty tends to focus more on hierarchical relationships than those characterized by reciprocity. Reciprocal relationships are recognized as a means to deliver social protection for the poor but often only in the short term or at a level sufficient to support survival versus advancement (Wood 2007, 2003; Cleaver 2005). This is because they tend to be networks among the poor, limited by few resources and difficult to sustain. However, the Afghan case exemplifies the central role of reciprocity (as well as patron/client relations) in the sustenance of livelihoods during the decades of conflict (GoA 2008; UNDP 2004). Studies of credit relationships in rural Afghanistan since 2002 illustrate the considerable resources available through informal reciprocal networks, supporting cultural resources such as marriage, consumption smoothing, crisis response and productive investments (Klijn & Pain 2007; Kantor 2009). While perhaps insufficient to challenge the status quo, the role of reciprocity and particularly in relation to access to credit, will be examined to determine under what conditions it might weaken the hold of dependent relationships and support individual progress, and what its limits are.

### **3 Methods**

This ESRC-DFID funded study aimed to assess patterns of rural livelihood change across Afghan contexts to understand notions of resilience and adaptation in conditions of state weakness. It builds from a previous study by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) documenting the state of rural livelihoods in Afghanistan in 2003-04 (Grace & Pain 2004). It revisits a selection of field sites to understand how and why changes occurred over the period 2003-2009. It was carried out by AREU and its partners, with the grant held by the School of Development Studies at UEA.

The initial 2003-04 study was conducted in 21 villages across 7 provinces. Fewer provinces were covered in this second phase due to its in depth qualitative approach requiring more time per site than the quantitative approach used in 2003-04, and due to security concerns. The study was carried out in 11 villages across four provinces (Kandahar, Badakhshan, Saripol and Faryab). There was some variation in how the study proceeded in each site. For Kandahar and Badakhshan NGO partners involved in the first phase study carried out the field work for this phase, after initial training and continuous monitoring from AREU. In Kandahar, even though the partner had long connections to the province, it could only safely carry out research in two of the three villages from the 2003 study. An AREU field team carried out the study in the three Saripol villages and also did the research in Faryab. However the Faryab work proceeded much differently to the other sites due to recent insurgent incursions into the study district. Data were collected primarily at the village level through focus group discussions held in the provincial capital with key informants and household respondents from the previous study to understand the effects of two major events: periods of drought and the district's growing insecurity.

The first study phase done in 2003-04 collected quantitative data from 20 households per village, distributed across wealth groups as defined by village elders. The second phase identified the 20 households (or those still remaining), had initial informal conversations with men and women from each, and then used this information to select eight households for in depth interviews. Selection was guided by diversity according to wealth group, livelihood trajectories (when such variation existed), household size and composition, land holdings and livelihood portfolios. The field teams primarily applied retrospective in depth interview techniques to explore household lives and livelihoods over this period and to understand how and why different decisions were taken and with what effects. The teams were composed of two female and two male Afghan interviewers, guaranteeing they could speak to both male and female respondents. In total at least four interviews were held per household (though not in Faryab), two with men and two with women. This information, along with the data from the initial informal interviews, provided a wealth of detail. This detail from the micro level was augmented by data collected on the study villages and districts such that household experiences could be understood within their contexts.

This paper focuses on the data from the Badakhshan and Kandahar case studies to examine the responses of the study households to experiences of state and institutional weakness as exemplified in these areas.<sup>2</sup> It will draw comparisons across village contexts and then illustrate household experiences within these, to show the diverse ways social relationships are meaningful to livelihood outcomes, for better or for worse.

#### **4 Household cases in context**

This section provides a brief overview of the two provinces on which this paper focuses to provide an understanding of their historical and demographic contexts. Then more detailed village and household case data are presented to illustrate how different actors, within their village locations, have used social relationships and to what end.<sup>3</sup> These data will be reflected on

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<sup>2</sup> See Kantor & Pain 2010 for a longer version of this paper incorporating all field sites.

<sup>3</sup> Due to constraints on length only selected household cases will be drawn upon from each village.

in the discussion section to follow, referring back to the literature on informal security regimes, adverse incorporation and dependent security.

#### 4.1 Kandahar

Kandahar province, located in the south, is the largest in Afghanistan. It is Pashtun dominated and Kandahar city is the second largest in the country, with an estimated 374,200 residents.<sup>4</sup> The province is agriculturally rich due to its irrigation resources and supports horticultural production including raisins and pomegranates. Kandahar city also offers a vibrant urban economy linked to licit and illicit cross border trade, a booming construction sector and a large international presence with its considerable aid expenditures.

Kandahar has been central to Afghanistan's political development as the origin of most of the country's ruling elites (Giustozzi & Ullah 2007). Tribal dynamics and power struggles are important to the province's political history. The main tribal alliance is the Zirk Durrani, comprised of five tribes (Popalzai, Barakzai, Achekzai, Mohammadzai and Alakozai). However the post 2001 period has been characterized by competing efforts to gain and maintain control in the province within this alliance between the Popalzai and Barakzai.

Prior to this, in the period after the Soviet withdrawal, new strongmen emerged to gain control of tribes (Giustozzi & Ullah 2007, Forsberg 2010). These were men not linked to previous landed elite but men who had gained power through jihad. However the loss of external funding for the mujahidin left these leaders fragmented and without resources, leading to conflict among them. This supported the rise of the Taliban. The period of Taliban rule provided physical security but overlapped with a period of drought (1994-98). Opium cultivation increased during this time as a means of economic survival.

After the Taliban's fall, strongmen re-established their positions in part through seizing or annexing land and becoming landlords, but taking on only some of the related obligations (Giustozzi & Ullah 2007). This shift to landlord status strengthened social hierarchies and patron-client relations within villages as well as from these village power holders outward as they sought a broader range of resources through which to maintain their power and status. Sources of resources include political elites in the centre and province as well as international actors keen to maintain positions in Kandahar from which they could support their military and development interventions (Forsberg 2010). It was at this time that the Barakzai and Popalzai rivalry emerged, with the Popalzai winning control in time though Ahmad Wali Karzai's<sup>5</sup> leadership of the provincial council and his amassing of a 'political and commercial empire' in the province (Forsberg 2010: 17); Ahmad Wali's personal links to Hamid Karzai in Kabul create important connections between Kandahar and the center of power. The district in which the study was done includes the home village of the Karzai family and is associated with the Popalzai. Therefore, as will become apparent below, connections to the Karzai family are valuable social resources for some study village residents.

Appendix 1 provides a comparison of the two Kandahar study villages across a range of characteristics. Both are similar in terms of location, livelihood opportunities and experience of

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<sup>4</sup> Central Statistics Organization. 2010. Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2010/11. GoIRA: Kabul.

<sup>5</sup> Ahmad Wali Karzai is President Hamid Karzai's younger half-brother.

the decades of conflict. However, their defining characteristic, shared but evident in different ways, is the presence of a strong social hierarchy which displays little more than self interest in the way in which the villages are ruled. In village KA it is one large khan (landowner) who wields power. He is the head of the village and its community development council (CDC) and an elected member of the provincial council. He holds considerable lands, along with a second major landowner (in another half of the village), and cultivates it largely through sharecrop arrangements with villagers. Many of the sharecroppers are in migrants with few of their own independent connections in the village; he provides many with housing as well as land and does not offer any form of secure contract in order to maintain his power and their allegiance. Village KB's social hierarchy is slightly more diffuse – spread among six maliks (village leaders) though the head malik is most powerful. He too is linked to provincial and central political power and receives patronage from these sources for his own advantage. While the study district receives a high level of aid due to its relative security, there is little evidence of its equitable distribution. Many services (health, education) are accessed in the city, for those who can afford to travel, and diverse respondents reported how the local CDCs, which manage block grants, have acted in the interests of the elite with little recourse for complaint.

The villages are socially conservative and access to education has been limited for men and boys and largely absent for women and girls except for one literacy course in village KB which was later commandeered by the malik. The connections of the village elite to Ahmad Wali Karzai and national political figures along with proximity to Kandahar city provides, under the present political arrangements, a relative degree of physical security. The proximity to Kandahar city has also offered economic opportunities from which the elite have disproportionately benefited. But even some of those lower in the social hierarchy have been able to achieve a degree of economic independence from the agrarian village economy. The means through which some individual households have reduced their dependence within existing social structures is explored in the household cases, as are more general patterns in how social relationships have contributed to livelihoods.

These two study villages provide examples of what Kabeer labelled 'privileged inclusion' (2000: 87) – those at the center of social institutions with the influence to shape the social life of others through regulating social norms and practices. The main landlord (LLA) in village KA is one, as is the head malik (HH B40) in village KB. LLA was not a respondent in the study but his position in the village became clear through reports of others' interactions with him and a key informant interview with him. His control of land and his hiring of many sharecroppers who are in-migrants to the village give him considerable power over the village and others' lives. He gives and takes sharecrop contracts without seeming concern for the welfare of his clients (see case A00 below), and field staff described those who work for him, including women who work within his home, as subservient, having to do his bidding in order to maintain their employment. All of this signals a weak moral economy within the village, particularly in the sense of the obligations of the wealthy. This dovetails with Giustozzi and Ullah's (2007) analysis of the new generation of power holders in Kandahar, who consolidated influence through gaining land but only took on some of the related obligations of patronage. Self interest rules. This is also clear in LLA's role as head of the community council, won through pressure on sharecroppers to show up and vote for him, as many reported. He used this influence to pave the road to and from his home, but not throughout the village. His power extends outside the village where he is an elected member of

the provincial council, over which Ahmad Wali Karzai presides. This connects him to considerable economic and political power in the province and country. These links to the government also make him a target of Taliban factions. Hence one reason for paving the road was to make the presence of improvised explosive devices more apparent, and he requires the service of his clients in providing eyes and ears for protection. If anyone sees anything suspicious they know to report it to LLA or his guard force – this reportedly has saved him from two bomb attacks.

The head of household B40 achieves power in village KB largely through his leadership of the CDC and the control of its benefits, and not through land ownership. Like LLA his relationships with villagers, including a number of relatives among them, is exploitative. The obligatory aspect of patron-client relations is weak to non-existent. In fact he displays ruthlessness in accumulation that counters presumptions around the role of mutual support networks in rural Afghanistan, and particularly among kin. He ignores a poor nephew's household (HHB56) though the young family is very energetic and strategic in building its livelihood and could benefit from short term support. More dramatically, he essentially hastened the death of his brother (HHB58) by not providing his young nephews credit to meet emergency medical costs; he then was reported to dupe his sister in law out of the deeds to his brother's land, driving the family into livelihood decline. One nephew from B58 describes B40's power and their own lack of voice in this way: 'We were young and we were afraid that he would kill us, therefore we couldn't say anything.' Finally HHB57, also the household of a deceased brother of B40 (headed now by another of B40's nephews), reports how B40 took over what was a family jewellery business after the brother's death. 'He is my paternal uncle and that shop was left to us; we thought we would also have part of that shop and five years ago I asked him about it. He smiled and told me, "That shop is mine and who are you to ask?"' LLA and B40 exemplify how the poverty of some supports the accumulation of others; they are the patrons who control local fiefdoms ensuring benefits come to them at the expense of others, even family. Among the wealthier households in the respondent groups are those who could be called secondarily included, using Kabeer's (2000) terminology. These are actors who are a step removed from the privileged insiders. They do not have the insiders' consolidated power or influence locally, but instead are linked to those with influence and gain advantages through these. They are included into existing systems from a relatively strong position, due to their diverse resources and relationships. HHs A10 and A05 in village KA fall into this group. A10 is the second land owner in the village, having significant businesses in the village (brick kiln, cattle market and slaughterhouse) and many male workers to draw on to manage them and their agricultural land. The head is also connected to Ahmad Wali Karzai, obtaining work for one son as his driver and able to draw upon him for help with business contracts and managing municipal regulations. Social connections to this economic and political power holder have added security to an already diversified livelihood. A05 came from humble beginnings to build wealth primarily through a contracting business and its expansion; the household, like most in village A, does not own land but through connections to both landlords it has made significant economic progress. He initially leased out LLA's land and managed the sharecroppers; because of the limited income from this work he started to slowly get work managing construction contracts – managing the land leasing, labour contracting and the like. As this was successful he continued to expand the services provided, including building materials. A10 was an important contact here, with its brick kiln. A10 gave bricks on credit which helped A05 expand into building material provision. A05 again had sufficient male labour to

support this work – a key condition for its success along with proximity to Kandahar city. However without the strategic connections to the two village landlords his accumulation process would have been less rapid.

In village KB the cases of secondary inclusion revolve around the employment benefits derived from links to Ahmad Wali Karzai, the President and fellow jihadis. B42 is another household coming from a position of relative poverty and insecurity to build a more secure and prosperous livelihood, due to access to regular employment for three sons. Its security has come since 2007 when two sons obtained work as soldiers in Kandahar city through an old jihadi colleague, and another obtained work as a guard in the President's office due to the father's connections to the Karzai brothers. His income has now increased by 290,000 Afs (\$5,800) per month allowing him to improve their home and marry a much younger wife after the death of his first. His connections outside the village have gained him social status in the village too, shown through his selection as assistant malik. Household B48 started out with inherited social and economic position, unlike B42, but it also gained through connections to the Karzais and the employment of one son in Kabul on security detail, netting 20,000 Afs regularly per month, to add to the household's income from raisins and a freight haulage business.

A number of case households also showed clear evidence of being enmeshed in exploitative relationships of dependence with those more powerful; these were more common among the KA households due to LLA's role. Among all such households there was a range of levels of dependence, as well as one household in village KA which moved itself out of a relationship with LLA.

The more extreme cases of dependent security include two in village KA and one in KB. A00 and A12 are the two poorest households among the respondent cases in both Kandahar villages and both are heavily dependent on LLA. A00 is worse off, with an aged and ill male head and an ill only son and therefore no able bodied male labour. The household moved to KA from another village which in 2001 fell into Taliban control; they therefore lost access to their own lands. In village KA the male head obtained sharecrop land and a home from LLA; this lasted for three years after which LLA took the lands and home back after the head of household fell off a tractor and injured his legs. His fitness for work was in question and instead of leading to obligations on the landlord's part, this accident led to loss of livelihood for A00. LLA introduced them to another landlord who provided a house, but in a very bad condition and position. The wife still works as a servant in LLA's home, but for no wage, only for leftover food. 'She goes in the morning and comes back in the afternoon. She also brings their leftover food. She serves the women with washing and cleaning. She doesn't have a wage. If we ask for one, they will fire us. Ten years she has worked there.' This is their primary source of support, since the male head and son are unfit for work. They also survive from the brideprice obtained for a 16 year old daughter recently married. Household B46 similarly lost its access to sharecrop land but this time after a 20 year history with its landlord. This happened reportedly because a relative of the landlord returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan, but also because of perceived lack of loyalty. The female household head reported that the landlord wanted farmers to work 'honestly' on the land – not work for multiple farmers at one time. Her sons had more than one contract so she felt this had a role in the loss of land. The household's need for credit as part of its survival strategy means it cannot risk the relationship with the landlord by complaining about the loss of sharecrop contract. Therefore its voice is diminished because of a lack of alternative credit

options, while the pro-action on the part of the sons in seeking multiple work opportunities was a threat to the landlord and therefore to be punished.

Household A12 has a female working as a servant in LLA's home and also lives in a house LLA provides. While A00 was dependent on LLA because of a lack of additional workers, A12 is dependent through having three sources of work through LLA. Along with the female head, one son (at the time of interview living outside the household) worked as part of LLA's security detail and one son sharecropped land. This sharecrop arrangement is more recent and provides a measure of food security but at the cost of a clear understanding of the need to, as a son says, "take care of the connection in order not to lose lands and work". The female head gets food from LLA's household, and the family also has credit links to LLA, most recently through a loan to meet a son's marriage costs. However, unlike A00, this household has more male workers and so also has two sons working with the second landlord in seasonal brick making. While this income is not regular, it provides links to another potential patron and some options. That said, the household is aware of its lack of independence, as the son says: 'There are...people in this village who have a comfortable life, they are not tied to one work. They can always shift their work to a more profitable work, but we cannot'.

Household A16 has done better in expanding its alternatives to dependence on LLA than those from village KA described above. It has gradually improved its economic condition, after arriving in the village in 1997 through a relative who was a sharecropper for LLA. On arriving, given the age of their relative, LLA took the lands from him and gave them to this family, showing his arbitrary use of power. LLA also gave them a house but from savings A16 was able to buy the land and house and therefore achieve some measure of distance from LLA. An uncle provided assistance through credit and was a consistent source of support to A16 – providing an alternative to LLA. Like A12 this household has multiple able bodied men in the household, so while one son works the land (providing 10 months worth grain per year), one works in the brick kiln and in other casual labour, and another works as a vender in the city. Females also do embroidery work. So while a link to LLA is still important to their livelihood security, they have more options than A00 or A12.

Household A03 was able to move out of its dependence on LLA, driven by the male head's disability, his forward orientation and supported by the vibrant urban informal economy of Kandahar and strong informal credit relationships. The male head was raised in village KA by an uncle and hence has a long connection in the village. He fought with the mujahidin under LLA and was wounded. On return to the village LLA gave him land to sharecrop, potentially showing some form of obligation in return for his military service and injury. On being unable to cultivate the land himself he leased it out and still had sufficient produce to feed his family. This freed him to start a small shoe vending business in the city in 2003; as it grew he realized independence from LLA by giving up the farming land, perhaps in recognition of the likelihood of the land being taken given other examples of this in the village, and buying land from LLA to build a home. The investment in the shoe business and the head's absolute commitment to educate his sons shows more agency and future orientation compared to others. While in debt due to the land purchase (he is currently renting out the house to cover construction costs) and purchase of a motorized rickshaw through which he can take his boys to school in the city, he and his wife are confident they can repay. This case is also interesting because in other households having multiple male workers helped provide some security; here there is only one male worker but his agency and

willingness to take some risks have helped the household gain independence. Whether the household is secure is another question, since anything that threatens their one income source could bring immediate decline.

Many cases in both villages, particularly among the middle wealth groups, illustrate the vital role of mutual support networks, specifically informal credit, to livelihood stability, and for some, to slow improvement.<sup>6</sup> This is particularly the case due to the villages' proximity to Kandahar city and its opportunities for productive investment. A03 was an example of this, as were A16 and B56. In the latter case it was links to the wife's family, which is better off, which provided consistent access to credit free of interest that facilitated the energetic focus of the male head on a range of activities to improve his family's condition. Reputation and belonging were noted to be important in order to maintain these networks, particularly a reputation for repaying credit and therefore creditworthiness. However, for all the weight placed on relationships of mutual obligation in Afghanistan, including in the government's social protection strategy, there are also limits to them that cannot be ignored. The case of household A19 illustrates the uncertainty attached to informal relationships of support, even from relatives. This widow headed household has lived free of rent in her brother's house in village KA for 10 years but was awaiting a visit from him to determine if this arrangement would continue or if they would be asked to pay rent. The terms of engagement among relatives and within all relationships are of course also important to assess and not presume, as was clear in the predatory relationship B40 had with his relatives in village KB.

Clear social inequalities that played out to differing degrees depending on the diffuseness of social power define the Kandahar village contexts. This meant that the use of social resources among case study households within each village varied largely by the households' social position and by individual factors, such as presence of able bodied male labour and willingness to take risks, supported by the proximity to Kandahar city.

## 4.2 Badakhshan

Badakhshan province is located in the northeast of Afghanistan. It is one of Afghanistan's larger provinces by area, and is mountainous, sparsely populated, remote and relatively underdeveloped. Its access links to the rest of the country are via one road which is often impassable due to rain, snow, avalanches or mudslides (Giustozzi & Orsini 2009; Pain 2010). It is a multi-ethnic province with Tajiks and Uzbeks composing the majority along with smaller minority groups including the Ismailis. It has a history of chronic food insecurity and recent data show that 73 percent of rural households reported low dietary diversity (NRVA 2005). Major livelihood activities include agriculture, livestock, trade and services, and non farm labour. Opium cultivation rose in prominence by 2000 and lasted through 2007; after this time, cultivation bans, threats of eradication and shifting terms of trade between opium and wheat led to a decline in cultivation, along with a decline in prosperity for those cultivating or otherwise benefiting from the multiplier effect on the rural economy (Pain 2010). One interesting characteristic of the province is a growth in the educated classes since the 1960s. This has led to significant investment in education in the province, which is estimated to have the highest rural literacy of provinces away from Kabul (Giustozzi & Orsini 2009; MRRD n.d.).

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<sup>6</sup> See Klijin and Pain 2007 and Kantor 2009 for more on credit networks and rural livelihoods in Afghanistan.

This will be an important factor for one of the study villages and is a key point of contrast with Kandahar.

Badakhshan has had a fragmented political landscape in part due to its terrain and the attendant difficulties of extending and maintaining control as well as due to its ethnic diversity (Giustozzi & Orsini 2009). It, as is common in Afghanistan, is characterized by patrimonial politics with the new government in 2002 and subsequent rounds of elections doing little to change this. Karzai seeks to maintain control in the province, to counter a local rival. He therefore supports his own representative, Zalmay Khan<sup>7</sup>, in the province giving him a free hand in making political appointments to secure Karzai support (Giustozzi & Orsini 2009). However, internal control remains a challenge and local power holders maintain a strong hand in their areas with little ability to consolidate power. According to Giustozzi and Orsini's analysis this inability to consolidate power limits interest in investing in longer term development needs; short term interests of these local leaders take priority.

Appendix 2 compares and contrasts the three Badakhshan study villages across a range of characteristics. It illustrates how considerably they vary in location, accessibility, demographics and educational investments, exposure to conflict, local leadership and external connections and their usefulness. In the case of village BA, an early investment in education facilitated its ability to build external networks that were strategically useful, for example in shielding the village from the worst of the conflicts. Education and the positioning of educated village residents in government posts and in NGO employment also came together to foster a social orientation in the village such that gains from access to employment in nearby lapis lazuli mines were reported to be distributed in the village and efforts among leaders were geared to accessing public and social goods versus only self enrichment. This positioned the village to cope with livelihood declines like drought and weakening of political connections linked to the mines. The village has maintained a measure of strategic political independence as well, evidenced by its refusal to support either main candidate in the 2009 Presidential election.

For village BB there is little evidence of engagement with the wider world prior to 1978, possibly due to its relatively secure agrarian economy. Helped by its defensive position after 1978 the village was able to organise military power that successfully provided security against external forces. After the departure of the Soviets, self-interest of the village power holders became more evident, reflecting perhaps the greater wealth inequalities of this village compared with the other two. As a consequence, there does not appear to have been the degree of social concern for the village by its leadership that is evidenced in village BA, and there has been limited action to secure public goods and development investment since 2001. Small and economically and socially marginal village BC gained physical security by achieving protectorate status under commander Qutbuddin and creating local strategic alliances. However, its lack of economic, social and political resources has limited the provision of public goods to its residents who face the harshest conditions among the three villages.

In Badakhshan, the study villages are quite different in terms of social structure and orientation toward the future and social goods. These differences have produced more variation in the use and usefulness of social relationships across the three villages in Badakhshan, with village BA

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<sup>7</sup> Zalmay Khan is the son of a local elder who had a close relationship to Karzai prior to returning to Badakhshan. He won a seat in Afghanistan's parliament in late 2005.

particularly standing out. Village BC most closely follows the pattern of social power found in the Kandahar villages, though not due to internal wealth differences. The village's outside protector, commander Qutbuddin, as well as a few others, exert considerable influence in the village, often to serve their own ends. Links to Qutbuddin are useful for residents but can also be exploitative, as the case of household C43 shows. Qutbuddin was able to assist the male head during the mujahidin period to spare him from conscription because he was the only male in the household at that time. However the head of C43 also relates how Qutbuddin is the authority turned to for dispute resolution due to the dysfunctionality of the local shura. This help is not always free. He related a case of the commander extorting 5000 Afs from him to settle an inheritance dispute. This head of household was lucky because an uncle intervened on his behalf to try to reverse the request or pay it himself. This illustrates the presence, not unusually, of help relations among relatives in the village.

There is also a general from the village, appointed to a post outside of the province, who exercises power locally. Household C49 experienced this at great cost. A son was demanded to serve as guard for the general which the household head could not refuse at risk of angering the general. However, the son was martyred causing great personal as well as economic loss for the family.

Interestingly, there was little evidence of local credit networks. Respondents reported relying on credit from sources outside the village – namely valley shopkeepers. This had detrimental effects as this credit was reported to be given with interest, even when it was in kind for food. The weakness of local credit relations is quite different from the other villages and perhaps reflects the social and economic marginality of the village. The inability to provide much credit within the village reflects the declining or struggling livelihood trajectory of all the study households, in part due to declining livestock herds sold off due to loss of opium income and dry conditions deteriorating pasture lands. There was also evidence of food rationing among the households in the two lower wealth groups. These conditions weakened mutual help relations, illustrating their precariousness in times of hardship, particularly in more remote locations.

Village BB's relatively greater inequalities in land holdings appear to have been coupled with self interest among the landed elite. This means that the village does not have a strong orientation toward providing social goods or towards mutual support; the latter is evident but not to the extent as in village BA. The head of household B70, among the wealthy case households, is well connected as a relative of two other land owners from whom he sharecrops in land. This means he has secure relations with them and confidence that the sharecrop arrangements he relies on to accumulate and maintain his wealth will not be arbitrarily removed. This has helped his household, but not necessarily the village. He also relates in his interview how the village doesn't have connections in Kabul to support the village, and did not support Zalmay Khan's bid for parliament and therefore cannot get help from him either.

The other households describe the use of social relationships primarily for employment and credit. In the former case, household B77 has an uncle in Kabul working with the national directorate of security and through him a son obtained a job in the police force. This household also expressed clearly how the poor depend on the wealthy. However, the recent dry period and loss of opium income means that the ability of the better off to provide assistance is declining. Most respondent households in this village report accessing informal credit from local families or

shopkeepers, without interest. This form of mutual help seems more common than in village BC, though maintaining these links is again dependent on having a reputation to repay.

Village BA seems to show more community cohesion, future orientation and action among the elite to work for the village good and not just its own advancement than the other villages. A moral economy seems to have survived recent economic struggles and the decline of its agrarian economy. The only case household in the highest wealth group is strongly connected outward – in the past to Commander Najmuddin<sup>8</sup> and currently to Zalmay Khan – showing evidence of secondary inclusion. The household has gained materially from these links, according to both the household head's own words and reports of others. A less educated daughter obtained a teaching post, a son was aided in his desire to transfer from Herat to Kabul University for his studies and a nephew obtained work in the lapis lazuli mine. So, while linkages and benefits in this village are more widely shared, this does not preclude private benefits or some measure of self interested action.

Household A34 provided the village its initial connection to Najmuddin; the head studied with Najmuddin at agricultural college and he used this link to request village benefits from the lapis mine after Najmuddin gained political power in the province. However, while villagers gained some employment from this link, Najmuddin responded strategically to the request, noting how the people from village BA were his people and could be counted on, so he needed to share the benefits of the mine more widely to build relations with strangers. HHA34 is an example of how, in the complex Afghan local political context, some households need to carefully balance social connections. The household is related to two rival local commanders with different reputations in the village. Commander Samad appears more exploitative and is disliked; hence household A34 did not support his actions during periods of fighting, seeking to maintain a distance and therefore his relationships in the village. Commander Mahboob is better liked in the village because he provides assistance, but has bad relations with this household due to its links to Samad.

Mahboob's help is illustrated in the case of household A23. The two households are related and Mahboob was able to get a local construction contract through the help of Zalmay Khan; he then provided the son in household A23 with work. This illustrates the rather typical use of relationships for employment related assistance. Interestingly though, three of the households in the sample obtained work with a major international NGO working in the village but the use of connections appeared limited in these processes. Instead a driving skill or education level played a larger role.

Internal credit relations appear strong in the village, even with the decline of agriculture. Relatives who are shopkeepers are important for the credit networks of some, ensuring interest free in kind credit. These relationships can come at the cost of reduced choice, however, as the case of household A24 shows. It learned the hard way not to purchase from other than its shopkeeper relative after buying some goods at lower price in the district center. For a time after this, credit relations with the relative stopped, with comments made about the household's ability to go to Baharak for supplies. As the head relates, 'After that we stopped bringing things from other places and we continued borrowing from him again'.

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<sup>8</sup> He was a commander under Massoud's Northern Alliance; he is reputed to have maintained a developmental perspective, supporting education for example, until his assassination in 1999 (Pain 2010).

The credit relations, investment in education in the village and its willingness to ensure past benefits of employment in the mine were shared, all show social cohesion. Social cohesion is also evident, along with the important, though perhaps weakening role of the moral economy, through the strength of charitable relations in the village and their entitlement status among the poor households in the sample.

Three of the four households in the poorest wealth group rely on charity as a major component of their livelihoods, particularly the obligatory giving of zakat.<sup>9</sup> Household A27 is headed by a male of 75 years and has three other members but no able bodied male labour. One relative in the village helped the family get an electricity connection and gives zakat annually to the household, composed of a seer of rice, one kilogram each of tea and sugar, and some soap. On top of this about 20 other households provide two kilograms of wheat each as charity post harvest, however the family's ability to depend on this varies with the level of agricultural output. This year the female head of household reported much less was provided due to drought. The male head noted how household A38 used to give zakat but has not recently since his crops were not good.

Household A33 more stridently reports the recent decline in levels of help. His household of eight relies on irregular wage income, charity and food aid provided by WFP linked to girls' school attendance. While he has many relatives in the village few provide help, because, in his view they are made happy by others' worsening condition. This reflects his personal circumstance where he had to leave work in the lapis mine after 20 years due to its effect on his health, leading him to sell off the livestock accumulated during that prosperous period. He has no land and had to sell a garden plot as well. His ill health has made him dependent on others, a change in circumstance that has brought him shame. He is less adversely incorporated into dependent relations than dismayed by a loss of dignity due to dependence. He notes how the nature of relationships has changed in his perspective, highlighting the limits to informal help relations: 'In the past economy was not important to build relations. People loved and helped each other in case of need in any situation. But now it is not like that. Whoever loses his economy loses his relations as well, because now people are eager to strengthen their economy and they do not care for relations'. Even with its economic and social downturn the three children in the household (2 girls and 1 boy) have remained in school. The parents are motivated to educate their children due to their own illiteracy, the enrollment of most children in school and role models in the village who are educated and have better jobs. This prioritisation could serve the household well in the medium to long term.

The case of household A22 also provides support for the perceived change in value placed on relationships, at least on the part of close relations. The head fell ill and lost the family's main source of income from his work maintaining a local shrine. His weakness and inability to contribute to the joint family led to his brothers separating households to avoid the burden of supporting his five members. This shows a self interest and weighing of economy over relations as noted above, perhaps necessary for a poor household in the declining economic condition of the village and recent dry spell. However the household also is related to A38 and receives charity from them, but again reportedly not this year due to the drought.

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<sup>9</sup> The giving of a small percentage of one's possessions to the poor and needy.

These three households show the damaging social and economic effects of ill health and the precariousness of dependence in a local economy that is in decline; while still considering themselves entitled to charity, and receiving some, this support seems less and less guaranteed. Poor household A36 illustrates the value of mutual help relations when there are workers and other resources present to contribute to their maintenance and assure others of the ability to reciprocate help given. This household of 11 struggles to earn enough to meet consumption needs; it has three male workers though one is 17 and is in school as well as recently working part time. All five school age children study, illustrating a willingness to struggle today to see a better future; this may in part reflect the literacy of the male head. The household owns land and has more livestock than the other families in the poorest wealth group, giving it more resources in general to work with than the others. The head is also strong in help relationships with those more powerful; the head of A38 is his cousin and Commander Mahboob is also a relative. They both are reported to help the household often. However, the male head is also clear about the value of mutual help relations and those with shopkeepers. In relation to the latter he notes his reputation as a hard worker who repays whenever he has money, so he has no problems in borrowing. He also clearly invests time and energy in his mutual relationships. 'Relations with other people are very valuable for me...It [relations] is kept secure by mutual respect, by visiting and helping each other in case of need'.

As noted in the village description, the provision of public and social goods is important in this village and the norm of school attendance, supported by aid allocations for girls' attendance, motivates even the poorer households to keep children in school. However, its poor agricultural economy means that the functioning of the moral economy varies with the size of agricultural output and some report a weakening of social obligations to the poor. On its own, even with its significant external connections, the village is unable to overcome its structural limits due to remoteness and low agricultural productivity. Its ability to depend in the long term on the agricultural economy is unlikely, as those who more recently prospered did so through having the skills and resources to access NGO salaried work. Given this medium to long term prospect, the attention to education will serve the residents well through providing boys and girls more choices outside the village than if this route had not been taken.

## 5 Discussion

The five village contexts described above show clear differences in terms of levels of dependent security and opportunities for autonomous development. This section integrates the empirical material with the literature to understand the factors underlying the relative positions of villages on a continuum of dependent security, and the different abilities of households to operate within these positions to achieve a measure of security.

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<b>Dependent Security</b>	KA	KB	BC	BB	BA	<b>Autonomous Development</b>
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Figure 1: Position of villages on continuum of dependent security

The figure above places the study villages in relative positions along a continuum of dependent security, with the left side representing village structures more closely approximating an informal security regime, including high levels of dependence, clientelism and self-interest, and the right representing structures oriented more toward the social good, with social relationships less characterized by adverse incorporation and more by mutual obligation and help which support more autonomous development.

The social, economic and political context of Kandahar Province, particularly its embeddedness in high level patronage networks linked to Kabul's political elite and to the extensive aid and military establishment, has shaped village experiences, making social inequalities more extreme than in the Badakhshan study areas. Connections to provincial powerbrokers, particularly Ahmad Wali Karzai, who then have links to the centre, drive privilege and the data show how privilege is used for personal gain, often to the detriment of others with less power who are adversely incorporated into relationships with little voice and few exit opportunities. Village KA, with its powerful and politically connected landlord, most closely represents characteristics of an informal security regime in which many achieve security through dependence, and relationships to state power are used for personal gain. However, this doesn't mean some have not been able to escape. Village KB has more diffuse power than KA and the maliks, and particularly those with connections to the Karzai family, are socially well positioned to control local resources and obtain privileged positions for sons generating significant income. Local leaders are not working for the village good, and even relatives are not guaranteed to benefit from the maliks' positions; the head malik exhibits predatory power. The maliks' social position has provided economic security, for as long as the current political situation holds. So the local power holders in both villages are also dependent – on the continuation of the current political economy operating in Kandahar and Kabul - and are therefore potential spoilers of international efforts to formalize and reform state structures.

The Badakhshan study villages are positioned relatively closer to the autonomous development side of the continuum, with BA closest to this outcome among the three. While social and economic inequalities exist in the villages they are enacted differently than in the Kandahar villages, perhaps due to the villages' relative economic marginality, harsh winters and general precariousness; households across wealth groups are all at risk of decline and therefore might place more value on the maintenance of reciprocal relationships and not alienating those from which they one day might need help. There is more evidence of a moral economy and efforts to use social relationships to support the social good, though this is far more apparent in village BA, and underlies its placement in the figure. Village BC, with its protectorate status and minority ethnic group is the poorest in social and other resources, even to the extent of not being able to support a local credit network; it is the least connected and most dependent. There is evidence of the protector's and a local general's use of power for their own ends, but the adverse elements of the village's incorporation into these relationships seem less severe or pervasive than for those dependent on local power holders in the Kandahar villages. Village BB falls between the other two Badakhshan villages, with higher land inequalities than in the other villages, a stronger agrarian economy that enabled greater self sufficiency, so less push for external connections. However, it provided less evidence of orientation to social good than village BA meaning it is placed further from the autonomous development side of the continuum.

Within these village classifications, what factors provided different households with more options for security, and particularly for voice and exit from negative social relationships? What role have reciprocal and/or charitable relationships played? The household cases clearly show that connections to those in power outside of the village can bring personal gain; this evidence was stronger in the Kandahar villages because of the link to state power. Some even advanced from a position of relative economic insecurity to prosperity due to their social connections to the politically powerful (HHs KA05, KB42). The extent to which these households diversify their connections and livelihood activities will influence their long term potential, particularly for those whose social and economic position is related to the current political context.

Those not labeled among the privileged or secondarily included, but who were able to achieve some measure of security often did so due to being rich in able-bodied male labour. This enabled diversification of livelihoods but was not necessarily sufficient to enable exit from adverse relations of dependence. This constraint was apparent in village KA due to the oppressive role of landlord LLA and his clients' unwillingness to risk his response if they were to break the relationship. This unwillingness is most apparent in the case of household A12, which has three income sources from the landlord and two separate from him, but still felt unable to shift more sources away from LLA. Those able to depend less on work from LLA, like household A16, seem to do better. This includes having informal credit sources other than the landlord. In Village KB the risks associated with trying to diversify and prosper are shown in case B46 which lost sharecrop land from one landlord due at least in part to the sons' desire to take on two contracts at once – this led to questions of loyalty.

The role of informal credit in aiding some to gain independence and begin to prosper is mainly found in Kandahar, related to the opportunities the urban centre provides. Two households in fact showed remarkable agency in exiting negative social relationships and slowly prospering, and with only one male worker in each. Their ability to access informal credit from 'friendly sources' and on good terms, their own forward looking and risk taking orientations as well as their energy enabled them to take up the opportunities Kandahar city offered. For household A03, his disability, and potentially less perceived 'usefulness' to landlord LLA, may have given him more scope to exit his sharecrop arrangement than others.

These two cases highlight the role of reciprocity in Afghan rural livelihoods; it was the ability to access credit free of economic costs which enabled in part the households' progress. Other cases, and particularly some in village BA, illustrate the role of moral obligation through charitable relations as means through which some households achieved a measure of security – dependent yes, but not necessarily exploitative. Moral obligation and mutual exchange relations are the main forms of available social insurance and much is done to invest in relationships with peers and relatives in recognition of this, including ensuring conformity to social norms to maintain belonging and keeping a reputation of creditworthiness for as long as possible. While these relationships cannot be romanticized – some expressed reduced choice of credit sources because they could not risk existing relationships, others noted the precariousness of relying on help in times of economic decline – their importance in a context lacking formal social protection or the scope for such intervention at the necessary scale in the short to medium term - cannot be highlighted enough. The question then becomes, what can be done to support these self help mechanisms. Those with able bodied labour or able to maintain credit worthiness and invest in mutual relationships had more scope to exit negative forms of dependent relations, were those

perhaps more closely associated with a Faustian bargain where options other than short term security are available, but may not be 'chosen' because of related risks. The case households lacking male workers due to age, ill health or extent of disability, were those most tied to dependent relationships, with few options other than these for any level of security. Some of these households may be supported through obligation and therefore not incorporated into adverse relations of exploitation, but they rely on the stability of these social norms and the economic prospects of the village, and risk exchanging their dignity for security (case BA33). These relations of moral obligation were more evident in Badakhshan. In village KA the two poorest case households (A00 and A12) had few choices about how to seek security – it was through LLA. However the conditions of this work for A00, and the lack of any other household member to work apart from the female head, made this an 'optionless choice' and pleasing LLA and his family central to their survival.

Patronage relations with varying degrees of exploitation and moral obligation, and reciprocal relationships of mutual help, define the social and economic life of the rural Afghan villages studied, and provide variable levels of security and autonomy based on proximity to opportunities, household demographics and labour power, and risk taking orientations. The conclusion briefly considers whether current social and economic policy in Afghanistan adequately engages with these social complexities to support rural poverty reduction, and how policies can be improved to better to reflect this social reality and therefore come closer to achieving their aims.

## 6 Conclusion

The Afghan government with support from the international community has over the last four years embarked on the process of developing and beginning to implement a poverty reduction strategy paper – the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS). This document has significant rhetoric about pro-poor growth and inclusion and develops a detailed poverty profile, but what is missing is an analysis of Afghan social life and how it might support or impede progress on poverty reduction. Efforts in 2009-2010 to re-prioritise the ANDS to speed implementation show the same gaps, and may be even worse since any focus on social protection, which had its own strategy in the original document, is largely lost in a focus on ramping up growth. Above all however, both the original ANDS and the new prioritized programmes show little interest in the presence of social inequality and unequal power relations, or of their role in creating and maintaining poverty. Policy solutions are simplified to fill gaps in access to resources like credit, skills, or agricultural inputs, without considering who might benefit and how social norms and existing inequalities might intervene in their distribution. There is no evidence of an effort to grapple with the social complexities shaping Afghan life, leading to technical solutions to problems with power and politics at their core.

The evidence from this study of rural livelihood change shows how this overly technical approach is grossly inadequate to the task at hand. It has illustrated how social relationships are central to Afghan life; how 'belonging' provides a base of social and economic security through mutual support networks offering credit and help in times of need, enables receipt of charity and also provides patronage links to the well resourced, which can be highly exploitative. This security may come with dependence, but given the institutional context within which most must

negotiate, this is perceived to be the best available option for many. The study also highlighted the precariousness of these relationships of mutual support or moral obligation, particularly in periods of economic downturn, as well as the risks embedded in individual efforts to exit the more exploitative forms of clientelism identified, meaning few try to do so. There is therefore a role for policy and programming to undergird existing informal support mechanisms to increase their reliability and to protect individual efforts to secure more autonomy, facilitating collective efforts to bring about change. However, post-2001 Afghanistan illustrates the seeming unwillingness of many national and international policy makers to engage with social complexity and to orient policy processes to the needs of Afghans. This unwillingness, compounded by the benefits gleaned by some powerful state actors and their local clients from systems creating and maintaining social inequality, means this role is unlikely to be fulfilled in the short term.

### Appendix 1: Kandahar study village characteristics

	KA	KB
Location/accessibility	Peri-urban; 10-15 minute drive from Kdr city	Peri-urban; 10-15 minute drive from Kdr city
Demographics	Pashtun (Popalzai) Low educational attainment & enrollment High in-migration (sharecrop for main landlord)	Pashtun (Popalzai) Low educational attainment & enrollment
Livelihoods	Non farm labour, agriculture Opium in past but never extensively cultivated	Agriculture, livestock, non farm labor
Land holdings	High inequality; 2 land holders, one with significant sharecropping relations	Inequality but less than KA; approx 500 ha irrigated land in total
Aid/services	No school; district receives aid due to relative security	Primary school but poor functioning, low attendance; literacy school for girls – commandeered by uneducated malik family
Local leaders	Khan with considerable, almost feudal, control; also malik, head of CDC (self-appointed). Armed for own protection	6 maliks: head, sub head and 4 others. Head holds most power. Heads CDC – for all maliks’ benefit
Conflict history	Post 2001 relative security Outmigration during conflict; return during Taliban	Soviet period bombardment due to proximity to airport Post 2001 relative security Outmigration during conflict; return during Taliban
Connections	Karzai’s home district Khan linked to current central & provincial government	Karzai’s home district Maliks linked to current central & provincial government

### Appendix 2: Badakhshan study village characteristics

	BA	BB	BC
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Location/accessibility	3 hours drive from district center; 2000m above sea level (masl)	45 minute drive from district center; 1200 masl; best placed for land, water and market access	2 hour drive from district center; only recently connected to road from valley; 2000 masl
Demographics	Largely Sunni; few Ismaili HHs; long education history; high education attainment and attendance (m/f)	Less education investment; school destroyed in conflict – not rebuilt until after 2001	Largely Ismaili and closely related; school was distant – few males benefited. Higher school attendance than BB now but limited by need for children’s labour
Livelihoods	Seasonal migration; livestock; lapis lazuli mines; opium at small scale Decline in opium and loss of link to mine	Agrarian economy; livestock; sharecrop in other villages Flourished with opium cultivation; resisted eradication but decline in cultivation post 2006 Outmigration; army & police employment	Grain deficits; seasonal migration; wage labour Opium cultivation but limited scale due to small land holdings; more wage labour Drought in 2008 led to migration to Iran
Land holdings	Low inequality; largest holding approx 4 ha irrigated land; 160 ha irrigated land in total and 240 ha rainfed land	High land inequality; 47 ha irrigated land in total and 13 ha rainfed	Pasture land reportedly taken for others – no response due to lack of power; 10 ha irrigated land and 40 ha rainfed
Aid/services	AKF: education, safe water, road improvement, micro hydel scheme Weak CDC	Opposition to CDC from local power holders	Access to a school and clinic in valley; no safe water Weak CDC but did pave road to valley
Local leaders	Managed conflict in mujahiddin time but carried out own violence; link to power holder in early 1990s	After 1989 local commanders appointed versus chosen - brutal	Post 1992 village commander sought protection from a predatory commander
Conflict history	Local leader (selected) able to minimize exposure during 1980s	Strong resistance to pro communist govt; heavy conflict locally but village defended	Religious minority status meant hostility and persecution 1978-92 but no direct war; post 1992 close to front line
Connections	Educated elite in govt positions, with NGOs. Diverse political connections, including to commander controlling lapis mine for a period (Najmuddin); externally linked	Under Najmuddin’s authority – he appointed local commanders Few other links for strategic advantage; distance from Zalmay Khan	Link to protective commander (Outbiddin) post 1992 – patron who secured allegiance through ensuring physical security No independent connections outside

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