



Afghanistan PEACE Project

Reducing Risk for the Kuchi People



RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR KUCHI HERDERS IN AFGHANISTAN

Report submitted to the PEACE Project by

Dr. Solomon Desta
Risk Management Specialist

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Executive Summary

The Kuchi are one of the poorest and most marginalized communities in Afghanistan. They have been subjected to decades of war, insecurity, ethnic tensions and several years of drought and bad winters. This has severely disrupted their traditional patterns of land use and the relationships necessary for mitigating problems for a risk-prone life-style. Traditional risk management strategies employed by the Kuchi including mobility, herd accumulation, shared herding labor, conflict management mechanisms and negotiation skill, etc. have been compromised due to environmental, demographic, economic, social and political factors. Consequently, the herding system employed by the Kuchi has become too risky to rely on as a sustainable livelihood. Risk can be defined as the possibility of occurrence of hazards or danger that can lead to loss or injury which could jeopardize people's well being. Risk management is the systematic application of management policies, procedures and practices to the tasks of identifying, analyzing, assessing, managing and monitoring risk to avoid losses and maximize opportunities. A focus group discussion (FG) with Kuchi shura leaders was conducted in December 2008 in Kabul to understand Kuchi livelihood strategies and to gain knowledge of the extent and intensity of the threat and risks that the Kuchi are facing currently. The intention of the exercise was to suggest ways to improve the risk management capacity and livelihood security situation for the Kuchi in Afghanistan.

The herds of the Kuchi are comprised of sheep and goats mostly, with a few cows. Their livelihood is dependent on a mobile livestock production system. According to the FG, the major risk factors that are rampant among the Kuchi include, insecurity and conflict, land conversions, drought, lack of access to water for both livestock and humans, shrinking access to summer rangeland, insufficient winter feed, animal diseases and cold winters accompanied by heavy snows. Insecurity, land conversion and drought were ranked as the top most important risks. Furthermore the FG indicated that historically, the Kuchi were the finest transporters and traders to facilitate commerce between south Asia and the Middle East. They also used to be fairly economically diversified. Currently, their participation in trade is non-existent and they have a poorly diversified economy outside of the livestock production. This situation leaves the Kuchi highly vulnerable to the combined effect of climatic variability and market fluctuations. In addition, poverty among the Kuchi is widespread. They are struggling hard to make a living out of a highly constrained, risky, and failing nomadic pastoral production system. It has been speculated that risk management interventions with a focus on human and social capital development could help to reverse the trend and to improve food security for the Kuchi. This report suggests approaches to develop and implement a Community Based Risk Management (CBRMP) pilot project to improve the wellbeing of the Kuchi. The pilot project will have a focus on investment portfolio diversification, conflict management, and social and human capital development. The project will be tried in 8 communities

selected from 4 districts from two provinces. Selection of the pilot areas will be based on security, accessibility and likelihood of success. The project will be implemented in partnership with local and international development and research organizations. Collective action groups with savings-led savings and credit schemes would be at the center of the whole process. The savings and credit mechanism is expected to encourage herders to market more livestock and save the proceeds for future use. This will help to minimize losses due to mortality during drought and bad winter and to minimize the risk of overstocking and overgrazing. The credit system should also enhance portfolio diversifications into non-livestock economic activities.

Action research will be a major activity in the project to document the process, assess impact and assist communities to solve problems that arise from practice. It is expected that based on the outcome of the pilot project the scheme will expand to other communities, districts and provinces gradually with an eye to integrate a risk management plan in rural development objectives and strategies in all Kuchi development programs.

Introduction

Rural people in different parts of Afghanistan have very different livelihood strategies. Forty seven percent of all rural households are engaged in agriculture, followed by non-farm labour (33%), trade (27%) and livestock (23%) and others 4%. This livelihood diversity appears to be a crucial strategy for the rural population in managing the risks and uncertainties that are a central part of their everyday life (NRVA, 2005). Furthermore, 64% of households in Afghanistan own some type of livestock or poultry, and these households use them as a source of income and food. Not surprisingly, among the Kuchi, 89% of households own livestock or poultry. In addition, the Kuchi own almost all of the camels in Afghanistan; and donkeys, sheep and goats are largely owned by the Kuchi (NRVA, 2005).

Extensive pastoral livestock production employed by the Kuchi, involving short and long range migration patterns to maximize temporal and spatial variability in the availability of pasture and moisture, plays a key role in the Afghan national economy. *Kuchi* is a term that is generally used to describe the transhumant or nomadic pastoralists of Afghanistan. In recent decades, however, many Kuchi have settled and began non-livestock dependent livelihoods. Others have lost their livestock due to war or drought and have been forced to partially settle but remained directly or indirectly livestock dependent. Most if not all of the settled Kuchi still perceive themselves as Kuchi even if they are not migratory or livestock dependent (Pastoral Development Strategy Document, USAID, Frauke de Weijer 2005). The focus of this report is on the migratory and partially-settled, formerly migratory Kuchi pastoralists.

The Kuchi are one of the poorest and most marginalized communities currently in Afghanistan. They have been subjected to decades of war and repeated droughts which in combination have severely disrupted traditional patterns of land use and the relationships necessary for mitigating problems arising from a risk-prone life-style. As a result, they continue to lose sheep and goats during extreme climatic events (e.g droughts and bad winters) with the result that there has been a substantial reduction in herd sizes all over the country.

In recent times, conflicts over resources among the Kuchi and between village farmers and the Kuchi have increased. Insecurity resulting from activities associated with local commanders or warlords is also on the increase. In addition, they suffer from other forms of risks including those related to markets, institutions (e.g. changes in resource access), restricted mobility, insecurity and conflicts and most importantly, climatic events including drought and bad winters. It is also clear that geography plays a key role in the type and degree of risk exposure one group may face. For example, areas close to markets are much less likely to suffer from market-related risks, while remote areas are more susceptible to insecurity due to local commanders. The areas where the Kuchi live or move with their animals are also characterized by a lack of veterinary services and infrastructure (transport, communication, financial institutions, etc.),

and other basic services such as education and health centers (personal communication with DCA, MAIL). Consequently, herding has become too risky a business for most Kuchi to rely on as a sustainable livelihood.

What is Risk and Risk Management?

Risk refers to the possibility of occurrence of hazards or danger that can lead to loss or injury which could jeopardize people's well being. It is the probability that a particular adverse event occurs during a stated period of time and cause harm or loss. Risk is a function of hazard and vulnerability. Vulnerability is defined as the lack of some form of protection or defense required to prevent being physically or emotionally wounded or hurt by a hazard. Vulnerability represents a lack of capacity or capability to withstand risks and an inability to cope with them. Risk does not result because of the occurrence of a hazard such as drought only. Rather, the capacity of the population, household or individual to withstand or cope with a risk is what matters. Vulnerability is an important concept that needs to be understood clearly when developing a risk management plan.

Risks can be characterized as idiosyncratic or covariant. Risks such as loss of a household head or illness of a member of a household is defined as idiosyncratic and its effect is on a given household or individual. The prevention, mitigation or coping strategies of such risks is heavily tied to the behavior or action the individual. In contrast, a covariant risk such as drought or disease epidemics, affects a larger community and consequently individual action has little role in preventing, mitigating or coping with a covariant risk.

Risk management is the systematic application of management policies, procedures and practices to the tasks of identifying, analyzing, assessing, managing and monitoring risk. Risk management is an integral part of good management. It is a way for an individual, household, community or organization to avoid losses and maximize opportunities. It is a continuous, adaptive process that needs to be integrated into all relevant aspects of the decision making procedure of an individual, household, community or organization. Moreover, risk management should be seen as an integral part of a broader development strategy. To have an effective risk management strategy, it should be incorporated or linked to other programs and strategies of rural development, food security, environmental conservation and poverty alleviation.

Risk management strategies have at least 3 aspects to them: risk prevention (avoidance or preparedness), risk mitigation, and coping. Prevention is a proactive measure put in place by individuals or populations to reduce the probability of occurrence of an event (or hazard), e.g. building a dam to avoid flooding. Mitigation is actions taken to reduce the impact of future risks e.g. portfolio diversification, insurance, etc. whereas coping is a strategy used to relieve or ease the impact once the risk has occurred. It is essential to consider these 3 aspects of management strategies to deal with different types of risks. In

addition, risk management strategies can involve informal arrangements such as those among community or kin-based mutual help support networks. Alternatively, they can be formal arrangements such as those acquired through market-based and public insurance, savings and credits and portfolio diversification programs. The latter also presents options in terms of assistance through subsidy, emergency aid, or government safety net programs.

Pastoral Risk Management

Pastoralism all over the world is a risk-prone mode of production. It is a high risk high return investment. Risk management lies at the heart of maximizing livelihoods out of the pastoral livestock production without compromising the sustainability of the natural resource base. Managing pastoral risk is important because it is a major determinant of pastoral poverty, food insecurity and environmental health.

Similar to other pastoralists in central Asia, traditional risk management strategies employed by the Kuchi include mobility and herd accumulation as a buffer against losses. Other factors in common include sharing herding labor, when labor availability is the limiting factor; strong conflict management mechanisms and negotiation skill to have access to seasonal grazing resources; purchasing livestock feed to supplement winter feeding; and de-stocking summer fattened animals before the winter. In Afghanistan, these traditional risk management strategies have been compromised due to several economic, social and political factors. Currently, movement is limited. The mobility of the Kuchi is one of their most important risk management strategies enabling them to react to changing circumstances in resource availability. This has hampered their ability to maximize the seasonal variability in availability of forage and moisture, both of which are essential to maintain production and improve herd productivity. The droughts that have been recurring for at least the last 10 years has depressed the Kuchi's ability to maintain their herd size; another important risk management strategy against livestock losses. Furthermore, their conflict management mechanisms and skills to negotiate access to resources have been made non-functional by those with the ability to look down on the traditions and instead, impose their own will on others. The Kuchi pastoral system is in a downward spiral of increasing poverty and food insecurity, as a result.

It is imperative, if possible, to reinstate those traditional Kuchi risk management strategies that used to be effective in the past, and introduce new ones that might be appropriate to the existing situation, in order to save the Kuchi and their herding system from further deterioration.

Risk Management Planning for Afghanistan's Kuchi

Risk Management Planning (RMP) aims at finding out what is in place and functional in terms of preventing, mitigating and coping with risks associated with

a livelihood, and then determining what additional strategies are needed to better address and manage these risks. To facilitate the planning process, the first thing needed is to establish the context for which the RMP is required. In this case, the stakeholders are the Kuchi themselves and any others who have an interest in the Kuchi pastoral system. The context can be established by understanding the: degree of vulnerabilities and capacities of the Kuchi; their existing livelihood options; and, the policy environment and resources available to address the various threats.

The second requirement is to identify the most important risks that affect the livelihood of the Kuchi. These are events that have an important effect on the livelihood security of an individual, household or larger group of Kuchi. Once the major risks are identified, they have to be analyzed and assessed to determine their chances of occurring, (very unlikely, quite likely). Their consequences (serious, very serious, etc.), the effectiveness of existing management practices to minimize these risks, and the nature, frequency and severity of those risks for which the current risk management practices are not appropriate or less effective also need to be assessed. Following, action is needed to either modify or reinstate existing management strategies or, the plan must propose new management tools that function on their own or in combination with traditional tools, to resolve the risk. The final requirement for a RMP is to design a management plan that includes a monitoring and evaluating component to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the RMP.

The whole process of development of a RMP for the Kuchi requires the active participation of the Kuchi and other interest groups at all levels. Moreover, any comprehensive risk management strategy is expected to have a long, medium and short term plan that includes an *avoidance or reduction of risk plan*, a *coping plan* and, a *rehabilitation or recovery from risk plan*. All these could involve different activities, actors and structures. In addition, throughout the process it is essential to keep in mind that recovery from risk is often overlooked or mixed up with coping by many risk management planners. That is why clear sub-plans within a RMP are essential to reducing the vulnerability of an affected household or group [to old and new risks]. It is also important to keep in mind that a long-term investment made to build the risk avoidance and mitigation capacity of communities is what determines the magnitude of investment needed to support a community during the recovery phase from shocks or risks.

Preliminary Assessment of the Risks for Afghanistan's Kuchi

In November 2008, I made a 2-week reconnaissance trip to Kabul, Afghanistan to appraise the livelihood situation of the Kuchi and the risks that are affecting their wellbeing. During my stay, I attended a 2-day workshop organized by the PEACE project aimed at linking the Kuchi with major donors and development practitioners in Afghanistan. As part of this workshop, I was given the opportunity to learn more about the livelihood situation of the Kuchi,] and what donors and

development practitioners are currently doing/willing to do to help the Kuchi. I was also invited to give a presentation on a pastoral risk management project in East Africa which I was currently managing.

Following the workshop, I conducted a focus group (FG) discussion with Kuchi Provincial shura leaders from Paktya, Jawzjan, Kunduz, Balkh, Wardak and Badghis. The discussion with these leaders focused on the existing livelihood strategies used by the Kuchi in these provinces and the different types of risks that affect the performance of their different strategies. I was also able to have useful meetings with officials from the Dutch Committee of Afghanistan (DCA), the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), the World Food Program (WFP), the Agha Khan Foundation (AKF) and Mercy Corps regarding the focus of their development programs in Afghanistan. The results from this effort are presented here followed by my recommendations.

Results: Assessment of Livelihood Strategies

This section focuses on the different livelihood strategies used by the Kuchi in Paktya, Jawzjan, Kunduz, Balkh, Wardak and Baghis Province. It also includes FG discussions regarding the type of risks the Kuchi face and the different ways in which they try to manage these risks. Table 1 illustrates the major livelihood strategies employed by Kuchi in Paktya, Jawzjan, Kunduz, Balkh, Wardak and Baghis Provinces and changes observed over time.

Except for income from fecal sale, all six provinces described similar livelihood strategies. The exception was that the Kuchi in Paktya claimed to not sell livestock feces to generate income. Although this information is preliminary, the Kuchi appear to have well diversified livestock-dependent livelihood strategies. They sell different species of livestock, of different age and sex categories, to earn income. They have skills in producing different livestock products including hides, skins, karakul pelts, wool, yarn, and carpets. According to the FG members, however, the Kuchi lack the required skill to make high quality hides and skin, karakul pelts, wool, or carpets. The Kuchi also sell kids/lambs and old and sick animals. Unless they are forced by emergency situations, however, they do not sell productive members of the herd unless faced with a dire emergency situations (e.g. bad winter).

In the past, the Kuchi raised a large number of Karakul sheep for producing Karakul pelts. This is not the case currently, Rather, Turki is the most common breed kept today and this breed is not suitable for producing Karakul pelts. Karakul skin is expensive and in high demand. Depending on the quality and workmanship of the skin, the price can vary tremendously. The best pelts are from Karakul fetuses rather than from older Karakul sheep. Currently, fetal pelts are limited in availability due to social and international pressures to stop the killing of late-term pregnant ewes. Furthermore, the decline in herd size has also

contributed to the decline in the production of fetal Karakul pelts. Because of this, what is usually sold is pelt from month-old lambs.

Table 1. Livelihood strategies of Kuchi living in Paktya, Jawzjan, Kunduz, Balkh, Wardak and Baghis.

Livelihood strategy	Paktya	Jawzjan	Kunduz	Balkh	Wardak	Badghis	Sold to ²
Sales of Live animals:							
kids/lambs	N & B ¹	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	VTM
old/sick	N & B	N & B	N & B	N & B	N & B	N & B	VTM
emergency							VTM
de-stocking							VTM
Wool	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	T
Human labor	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	
Machinery rental	Not common now or in the past						
Karakul hides	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	M
Other animal Hides	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	VTM
Farm wheat	Not common now; not at all in the past						
Trading shoats	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	
Chicken/eggs/turkey	N	N	N	N	N	N	
Labor in fields	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	
Fecal sale (fuel, fertilizer)		N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	VTM, bakery
Embroidery	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	
Carpet	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	
Yarn	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	
Dairy products	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	N& B	VM

N & B: N = Now, B = Before

Sales: V = Village; T = Traders; M = Market

The Kuchi earn income from the sale of animal fecal material used for fuel and fertilizer. Income from the sale of fecal material goes to Kuchi women. Women also earn income from the sale of embroidery items, carpets, yarn, chicken/eggs/turkey products and dairy products, when there is excess beyond the need of the household. It is also women and children who are responsible for bringing the dairy and chicken/turkey/eggs products to the market.

The FG reported that the Kuchi have poor access to markets to sell their animals and products at a fair price, for the most part. They reported that it was the traders that benefited the most from livestock transactions. Slaughtering animals for home consumption was a rare practice. The exception was when an animal was attacked by a predator or dying from illness. In those circumstances, they reported slaughtering and eating it before it died.

When it comes to non-livestock based livelihood strategies, the Kuchi appear to have a very poorly diversified economy. Hired labor to work in agricultural fields was the major non-livestock dependent income-generating livelihood strategy engaged in currently. Although reported earnings from labor (i.e., usually food, not cash) were low in terms of their contribution to the total household food requirements, these earnings were possible year-round. Winter was reported as the peak season for hired labor. Most of the income from hired labor came from working in agricultural fields and the workers are generally paid in-kind not in cash. It was reported that if one worked on a wheat farm he or she would be paid in wheat; on a vegetable farm it would be vegetables. Older people, women, and children were those reported as mostly being involved in farm labor. The Kuchi also earn some income from trading in livestock and livestock products, but this was reported to be uncommon and not of high value. Another form of income was from renting farm machinery. This was reported for a few wealthy Kuchi therefore, its overall contribution to the Kuchi economy was considered insignificant. Furthermore, because agriculture is equally susceptible to climate shocks as livestock, hired labor and machinery rentals are not considered worthy diversification strategies to mitigate livestock losses.

The focal groups ranked their different livelihood strategies based on the number of Kuchi practicing them and their level of contribution to household consumption and expenditure (Table 2).

As expected and commonly true in pastoral systems in the world, income from sales of livestock ranked the highest by all FG members. Income from carpets and wool ranked third and were of equal importance as reported by the FG. Despite the fact that production of Karakul skin is on a decline, it was still perceived to be an important livelihood strategy by all the FG members. The reason given for this was that just a few pelts will fetch a sizable income for a household. For The Kuchi who winter in the Baghis, Balkh, Paktyka, Wardak, Kunduz and Jawzjan Provinces, the top 4 livelihood strategies in Table 2 were described as the pillars of their wellbeing.

Table 2. Ranking of livelihood strategies in terms of importance.

Livelihood strategies	Rank
Live animal sales	1
Karakul pelts	2
Carpet	3
Wool	3
Yarn	4
Hides	5
Trading animals	6
Embroidery	7
Dairy	8
Human labor	9
Fecal material	10
Chickens	11
Machinery rental	12
Camel trading	13

Results: Wealth Class

Sheep and goats were the main species used to determine wealth class among the Kuchi. Other species such as camel, cow, and horse played a peripheral role. Income from non-livestock sources were not considered at all for wealth classification. This may be due to the Kuchi's limited involvement in non-pastoral activities for generating income or accumulating wealth. According to the FG members, in the past a Kuchi household owning at least 5000 shoats was considered wealthy. In contrast, a household owning 1000 shoats today is considered wealthy, if one can actually be found to own so many. The FG members believe the Kuchi are getting poorer and poorer, with many changing livelihoods in response to the loss of their entire herd. Today, a household with 500 or more animals is considered middle income, and those with less than 500 low to poor income.

Table 3. Estimate of percentage of wealthy, middle and poor Kuchi in Balkh, Badghis, Jawzjan and Kandahar Provinces.

Class/Province	Balkh	Badghis	Jawzjan	Kandahar
Wealthy	5-7%	5%	5%	2%
Middle	40%	35%	35%	20%
Poor	53-55%	60%	60%	78%

According to the FG members the situation reported in Table 3 is not that different in all the other provinces in Afghanistan. The FG reported that 20-30 years ago, there were very few poor Kuchi in contrast with today, where it is estimated that between 55% and 78% Kuchi are considered poor. The Kuchi in Kandahar are considered the worse off after having lost more than 70% of their herd during the droughts in the late 1990s and early 2000's.

From experiences in pastoral systems elsewhere in Africa and Asia, female headed pastoral households constitute the poorest of the poor and the most risk-prone section of the society. It may also be true of the Kuchi. Based on the opinion of the FG members, the number of female-headed households among the Kuchi is not that high. For example, in Balkh, Jawzjan, and Badghis, the estimate was only 5%. This, however, requires further study to establish the fact. There could be more female-headed households among the Kuchi than what the FG members have suggested. One would expect a higher figure given the history of war and increasing insecurity in Afghanistan during the last 2-3 decades. It is possible to have more widows as it is the men who are mostly killed during a war or conflict.

For those female Kuchi head-of-households, it is the widow who owns the livestock when the husband dies; and it is the widow who manages them until the first born son becomes old enough to take over responsibility. Although her handover of the stock is voluntary, it is uncommon for a woman to keep the stock rather than transferring them to the oldest son when he is ready to shoulder this responsibility. One reason for this is that in taking the stock, the son is also taking on the responsibility of taking care of his mother for life.

Identification, analysis and assessment of risks

Risks that threaten the Kuchi are many and of different origins. For this reason, it is difficult to list them all. This report considers the major risks seriously affecting the wellbeing of the Kuchi (Table 4) and the frequency and seriousness of their affects (Table 5). According to the FG members, insecurity and conflicts are the two most important risks in their lives, followed by land conversions and drought.

Table 4. List of major risks that affect the livelihood of The Kuchi

Risk Type	Ranking in terms of importance
Insecurity and conflict	1
Land conversions	2
Drought	3
Water	4
Access fee to grazing	5
Winter feed	6

In addition to the top six risks ranked above, animal disease, insufficient winter feed, extremely cold temperatures, floods, and heat waves were also risks mentioned by the FG members. These too threaten the continuity and sustainability of the herding system.

The frequency of occurrence for some risks such as drought was considered high and when it occurred its effect was ranked as very severe. The Kuchi can lose as much as 90-100% of their accumulated herd during drought times. Access to summer grazing was a serious risk reported to occur every summer and for this risk as well, one can lose their entire herd if they are unable to pay a grazing fee or do not already have a personal relationship with a villager.

Insecurity that emanates from the theft of animals was also reported as being very common and serious enough to affect the livelihood of the Kuchi. When it does occur, the Kuchi can lose all or most of their animals in one instance alone. In addition, there are many places where the Kuchi live and migrate through still littered with landmines. The FG members reported that the impact of landmines on their livelihood was low, however, due to the limited numbers of animals lost in the rare instance when they did encounter one.

Table 5. Frequency and severity of top six risks for the Kuchi.

Rank	Risk Type	Frequency ¹	Severity ¹
1	Insecurity		
	Criminal theft of animals	High	Medium to High
	Landmines	Low	Low
	Commanders fighting	Low	High
	Illegal fee assessment	Low	High
	Insurgency activity	Medium	Medium
2	Land conversions	High	Medium
3	Drought	High	High
4	Limited water	High	High
5	Access (fee) to summer grazing	High	High
6	Winter feed	High	Moderate to High

¹L = Low, M = Medium, H = High

During the FG discussion, the members reported that commanders periodically fight each other to gain control over a given area. When such fight occurs, and if the Kuchi are in the area when it occurs, the Kuchi have been known to lose their animals and other property to the new commander, if he wins.

In those migration corridors under the control of commanders, Kuchi are expected to pay taxes in proportion to their herd size to pass through or in order to utilize resources (e.g. forage and water) in the corridor. Taxation is also common in summer grazing areas. Depending on the availability of resources and the severity of the drought, the fee can vary. During drought times the fee can be as high as 50% of one's herd size. If one is unable to pay the required fee, it is possible for him to lose his entire herd from starvation. As stated previously, access to summer grazing is critical to the survival of the Kuchi. The livelihood of the Kuchi can be crushed completely if they are unable to access summer grazing areas for free or at a nominal fee.

The Kuchi are also affected when they find themselves caught in the middle of a fight between the Taliban and the government. Kuchi often assess available information to avoid potential fighting grounds; they may also limit their movements when they are already in the fighting area. The Kuchi also reported buying protection from commanders when traveling through or occupying certain areas. The risk however is, if another powerful commander overruns the "protector", then the Kuchi can easily lose their entire herd and other property

The FG members reported that conflicts and insecurity tend to be more frequent during drought times. In these instances, conflicts among migrating Kuchi are more frequent as well due to the lack of available resources. Conflicts between migratory/settled Kuchi and non-Kuchi villagers, also tends to increase during drought events. Villagers often have more guns than the Kuchi and as a result, the Kuchi are easily over powered when a fight ensues.

A commander (current or former) who kills many people is considered to be powerful, and is respected. One of the FG members said “if a commander asks you to carry him around, you can’t ask why; you have to do it quietly to avoid death”. The other FG members said “Kuchi are as insecure in rural areas as are expatriates are in Kabul”. On average, the Kuchi lose about 20% of their herd annually to either commanders, thieves or other criminal elements.

The Kuchi pay commanders and well-owners for access to water. The Kuchi do not have free access to water wherever they migrate. Sometimes depending on a prior good relationship with a villager, the Kuchi can have access to water for free or for a nominal payment. Lack of access to water was a major risk factor identified by the Kuchi.

Rangeland areas continue to fall prey to illegal cultivation activities all over Afghanistan. The area’s most susceptible to conversion tend to lie between 300m and 1500m elevation. It is these same areas that the Kuchi occupy during the fall, winter and spring, and pass through on their way to higher elevation grazing areas. In some locales, the government is trying to stop the illegal cultivation of rangelands but oftentimes, they find themselves hampered by politics and finances.

Summary and Recommendations for a Risk Management Plan

The proposal presented here is a result of information collected during the Focus Group meeting, from materials presented in the two day workshop, from various publications, and from meetings held with key DCA, MAIL, WFP, AKF and Mercy Corps representatives. This proposal is intended to be modified as more information becomes available and in response to lessons learned in the process of implementation.

All discussions and records confirmed the overwhelming threat and risks that the Kuchi are facing today in Afghanistan. These include insecurity and conflict, land conversion, drought, lack of access to water for livestock and humans, lack of access to summer rangeland areas, and insufficient winter feed. Other threats mentioned by the FG members including animal disease epidemics and cold winters were not among the top five on the list of risks. Everyone in the FG ranked insecurity, land conversion and drought as the most important risks. It should be kept in mind, however, that the listing and ranking of the risks by the FG members may not exactly reflect the perception of Kuchi living in other

provinces in Afghanistan. Consequently, differences in risk perceptions will have important implications for risk planning interventions for Kuchi who reside in different provinces.

The outcome of the discussion with the FG members revealed how poorly the economy of the Kuchi is diversified outside the livestock system. For the Kuchi, the major non livestock-dependent income generating livelihood strategy was hired labor. Most of the income from hired labor comes from working in agricultural fields. Hired agricultural labor, however, is not a good diversifying activity to mitigate livestock losses from risks of drought and bad winter since agriculture is as susceptible to drought and bad winters as is pastoral production. The Kuchi are known to generate some income from trading, but it was insignificant. A poorly diversified economy outside pastoralism leaves the Kuchi highly vulnerable to the combined effect of climatic variability and fluctuating market prices.

The situation in which the Kuchi currently find themselves can be characterized as a high risk situation. They are struggling hard to make a living out of a highly constrained and failing pastoral production system. A risk management strategy is needed that avoids or minimizes losses, relaxes constraints, maximizes opportunities to reverse the trend, and to improve food security for the Kuchi.

The following brief proposal is a general guideline based on information collected during the two week field trip to Afghanistan. The proposal will be refined as more information becomes available on traditional and existing risk management strategies employed by the Kuchi. It is essential to understand the existing risk management approaches and strategies which are functioning successfully; it is also essential to understand those which were tried and failed, in order to better build on what is working well.

The overall objective of the proposal is to develop and implement a Community Based Risk Management (CBRMP) pilot project for a period of 3 years. Focus on investment portfolio diversification, conflict management, and social and human capital development are envisioned as priorities for this CBRMP. Trained Collective Action Groups (CAG) will serve as the vehicle to implement the project.

The steps to initiate such a program include:

- 1) Identify 2 districts each, within two provinces for start-up pilot projects. Some selection criteria include good security, accessibility, and the likelihood of success. The PEACE Project has proposed Balkh and Jawzjan Provinces given these criteria.
- 2) Select four communities from each district (two fully migratory, 2 partially migratory), a total of 8 communities to start the project. The

- 3) Identify partners at the national, provincial and district level who would be willing to participate in the pilot project. NGOs such as DCA, Agakhan Foundation and Mercy Corps have been identified as good partners. Out of the 34 provinces in Afghanistan, the DCA has presence in 19 provinces including those occupied by the Kuchi. DCA implements a veterinary health program among the Kuchi. They have 350 Veterinary Field Units (VFUs). The DCA operates mainly with the settled and partially settled Kuchi as these groups are easily accessible. In contrast, those Kuchi which are fully migratory have limited access to DCA VFUs. Government institutions including the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Ministry of Health (MoH) would make good partners. There are 435 districts in the country and most if not all of these Ministry's have a presence in all 435 districts.
- 4) The development and sustainability of a Risk Management Strategy requires good leadership, strong collaboration and regular involvement in the design and implementation of a risk management program. A partnership that could be led by PEACE that involves key actors with interest in Kuchi development could be formed and implemented to oversee and facilitate, adopt and support each risk management program.
- 5) Train partners in Participatory techniques, partnership development, Risk, Risk management, Participatory risk mapping techniques, formation and development of Collective Action Groups and methods to conduct action research, etc. It is always essential to make sure partners have a clear understanding of the objective of the project and their roles and responsibilities be defined unambiguously.
- 6) Once partners are identified and trained, they are to form a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) team to conduct a targeted PRA for risk management for each of the selected communities. A combination of tools such as FG, Key Informant (KI), and participatory risk mapping will be used to complement the PRA exercise.
- 7) This participatory primary data-generating process uses local perceptions of risk. It will be complemented by secondary sources of information when completed. The PRA will be conducted at the community level. Risk assessment of each community may result in different priorities for the risk management program. Consequently, the

- 8) The best way to start a risk management program is to strengthen existing and functioning risk management strategies (both formal and informal) and to build on what is already working successfully. The PRA exercise will be tuned to answer questions such as, “what risk management activities are already in place and successful?”, and “what has been tried but failed?”.
- 9) Based on the collected PRA information, assist each community to develop a community action plan (CAP) to deal with risks they perceive as the most threatening.
- 10) It is proposed that all CAGs be driven by savings-led savings and credit schemes. This financial institution is expected to be community based, simple and locally controlled. An appropriate savings mechanism should be put in place that would encourage individual Kuchi to market more livestock in a timely fashion to avoid losses, and to minimize the risk of overstocking and overgrazing. The loaning system should also enhance portfolio diversification into: non-livestock income-generating activities, livestock fattening programs specific to targeted markets, and restocking to re-establish a viable herd size. A literacy program will be introduced as the interface to the savings and credit program. Other activities such as value addition of livestock products, marketing, strategic fodder reserves etc. will be introduced based on the needs of the target community and their CAPs. Communities should not be overloaded with too many activities; they should be given the time and space to be effective, efficient and expand within a reasonable time frame.
- 11) A CAG can possibly be organized based on a group of households that have a clear sense of identity, winter in one area and use the same summer grazing areas. It could be tribal based with a clear leadership structure or structured by the community shura. Either of these will require more study to understand the various territorial and social organizations among the Kuchi, and their values and culture, to suggest ways to organize them into CAGs with a well defined function. It is essential that the CAG needs to have a clear function if it is expected to survive. If properly formed, CAGs can enable the Kuchi to position themselves for better access to services, and lobbying and

CAGs are designed to help improve income, modify social and power relationships, foster social networking and collaboration; reinforcing standards and values such as solidarity, reciprocity, and trust which are essential for achieving common good (social capital). CAGs can be used for dissemination and utilization of information including early warning information. CAGs, however, are not a substitute for and indeed require individual effort and responsibility to be effective. CAG strategies require achieving objectives gradually, starting with those that are less complex and moving to those of greater complexity.

- 12) Expand to other communities, districts and provinces gradually with an eye to institutionalization of a risk management plan in all Kuchi development programs. A risk management plan would be sustainable when it is integrated with other rural development objectives and strategies.
- 13) Action research (e.g. baseline survey, monitoring, and evaluation) will be a major component of the project. A system will be put in place to conduct action research to document the process, assess impacts and solve problems encountered in the process of implementation for improved results.

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Contacts

Dr. Michael J. Jacobs

Chief of Party

Afghanistan PEACE Project

Research Scientist

*Agri*LIFE RESEARCH Texas A&M University

Dept. of Ecosystem Science and Management

College Station, Texas 77843

mjacobs@cnrit.tamu.edu

Mobile +93 (0) 798 201 762

Web www.afghanpeace.org

Dr. Catherine Schloeder

Afghanistan PEACE Project

Research Scientist

*Agri*LIFE RESEARCH Texas A&M University

Dept. of Ecosystem Science and Management

College Station, Texas 77843

cschloeder@cnrit.tamu.edu

Mobile +93 (0) 798 201 763

Dr. Solomon Desta

Risk Management Specialist

PARIMA Program

Utah State University

Nairobi, KENYA

s.desta@cqi.org