Empowering Afghan Herders to Build Peace and Improve Livelihoods

M. J. Jacobs1, I. Naumovski2, C. A. Schloeder1 and R. M. Dalili3
1Texas A&M University, 2Afghanistan PEACE project, 3Sanayee Development Organization

Research Brief O9-O1-PEACE December 2009

The Pastoral Engagement, Adaptation, and Capacity Enhancement (PEACE) Project has been working to increase extensive livestock production in Afghanistan since 2006. The project is institutionalizing technologies with both the Range and Livestock Production Departments within the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, that will facilitate better management of Afghanistan's rangelands. Transhumant populations commonly referred to as Kuchi are the primary extensive livestock producers in Afghanistan. They comprise about 8% of Afghanistan's population, but are responsible for approximately 75% of all livestock supplied to Afghanistan's major livestock markets. Like other transhumant livestock producers, land tenure issues and insecurity are major challenges and 30 years of war has completely changed the social landscape for herders. Good rangeland management is essential but if extensive producers cannot reach important mountain rangelands in summer, management becomes less relevant. The PEACE project has been working to develop conflict resolution and peace building capacity within the Independent Department of Kuchi (a department directly under the President). In collaboration with Sanayee Development Organization, a local NGO experienced in delivering conflict resolution training, PEACE has assisted in training 138 Kuchi Provincial Directors and Kuchi leaders in 26 provinces to date. In addition to these leaders, over 300 representative leaders from the Kuchi and various villages have undergone joint training workshops that aimed to promote constructive and peaceful working relationships among communities. Working within the context of the Kuchi's organizational structure and culture, the project has employed multiple methods to empower these leaders to develop a large cohort of Kuchi leaders who understand how, and have the tools necessary, to solve their land access problems peacefully.

Background

Transhumant populations in Afghanistan are commonly referred to as Kuchi. Currently and historically, it is the Kuchi who have been the primary extensive livestock producers in Afghanistan despite representing just 8% of Afghanistan's total population. Research by the PEACE project has determined that the Kuchi are responsible for approximately 75% of all livestock reaching Afghanistan's major livestock markets (PEACE Project, 2009). The Kuchi also provide dairy products, hides and karakul products essential to Afghanistan's economy, yet their provision of wool and carpets is deemed their most significant economic contribution. The Afghan carpet industry alone is estimated at $187 million USD per year and extensive livestock production supports thousands of jobs associated with this industry. Despite their economic importance, the Kuchi, like other transhumant livestock producers, face land tenure issues and insecurity as major challenges on a daily basis. Thirty years of war have completely changed the social landscape in Afghanistan and herders now experience frequent issues in moving their animals from traditional wintering lowlands to summer mountain grazing areas, due to the conversion of large tracts of rangelands to rain-fed agriculture. The Kuchi now move their animals by truck to bypass these areas or pay exorbitant fees to travel through what were once traditional migration corridors. Villages are also expanding into what were once deemed public rangeland areas, particularly in wintering areas, challenging traditional land-use arrangements between herders and the villagers. Further complicating navigation of Afghanistan's countryside, are the presence of criminals, and ex-military commanders and warlords in certain areas, adding an additional security risk to an already complex web of land-use, land tenure, and social collapse issues encountered by the Kuchi.

The Afghan central government is still weak in the rural areas of Afghanistan, offering very little or no control over land-use disputes and rural conflict. The Kuchi, perceived as "outsiders", find even less support when they are in conflict with a villager or ex-commander. These factors all contribute to a decline in livestock production and extensive environmental degradation in a large number of areas throughout the country. Programs aimed at improving management of Afghanistan's rangelands and extensive livestock production are also seriously impeded when producers find they cannot reach important summer grazing areas.

The Pastoral Engagement, Adaptation, and Capacity

Global Livestock Collaborative Research Support Program
University of California, Davis ■ 258 Hunt Hall ■ Davis, California 95616 USA
Phone 530-752-1721 ■ Fax 530-752-7523 ■ E-Mail glcrsp@ucdavis.edu ■ Web glcrsp.ucdavis.edu
Enhancement (PEACE) project has been working to increase extensive livestock production in Afghanistan since 2006. PEACE is institutionalizing technologies with both the Range and Livestock Production Departments within the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), that will facilitate management of Afghanistan’s rangelands. Through the transfer of these technologies, PEACE is incorporating the GL-CRSP Livestock Early Warning System and Livestock Information Network and Knowledge System (LEWS/LINKS), active in East Africa and Mongolia, into MAIL’s country-wide surveillance and monitoring program to assist with proactive management of Afghanistan’s rangeland issues. The LEWS/LINKS technologies are also intended for use as rangeland management tools designed to assist in production and management decisions at the herder level. However, their benefits are limited if the Kuchi are unable to reach summer grazing areas. To address this issue, the PEACE project has been working to develop conflict resolution and peace building capacity within the Independent Department of Kuchi, a department directly under the President.

Conflict resolution has always been a component in the PEACE project but it became more important given how critical the land access situation was in Afghanistan. The PEACE project’s approach to conflict resolution is very simple: 1) understand how the Kuchi, as a culture, organize themselves; 2) understand their traditional means of solving problems; and 3) begin to deliver training in ways that incorporate lessons learned from the first two approaches and that facilitates peaceful resolution of conflicts at the community level.

Major Findings

The Kuchi are organized into clans with a clear leadership structure. In 2006, the Independent Department of Kuchi (IDK) was established. It operates as a governmental quasi-ministry and a representative body of the Kuchi. The IDK is responsible for addressing all social, economic, and political issues affecting the Kuchi across Afghanistan. This newly formed department has little capacity or capital to really help the Kuchi, particularly the herder majority. The Department has 30 provincial directors and PEACE has identified several interested in improving extensive livestock production and gaining conflict resolution skills. In Afghanistan, shuras are the “assemblies of leaders” that Kuchi and other groups use to solve problems and settle disputes. Shuras are comprised of the most powerful and respected leaders in a province or district. The shuras and traditional decision-making assemblies are estimated to account for more than 80% of conflict-based cases settled throughout Afghanistan (UNDP/Human Development Index 2007). After understanding the nature of the traditional Kuchi problem-solving context, PEACE began providing training to 26 Kuchi Provincial Directors. To provide training in local languages, PEACE partnered with the Sanayee Development Organization (SDO), an Afghan NGO experienced in delivering conflict resolution training both Dari and Pashto.

In June 2008, the PEACE project also began facilitating monthly Kuchi shuras in 10 Provinces. Because the Provincial Directors had no budget to hold these meetings, PEACE project support enabled the peace and negotiation messages to reach more Kuchi leaders. In addition, by supporting these meetings, PEACE was able to collect information about the Kuchi on a wide range of topics by clan and by season. The PEACE project is now supporting shuras in 13 provinces in collaboration with the IDK.

The next step in the peace-building and conflict resolution process was to increase the capacity of the Kuchi, at the Provincial level, to resolve conflicts independently. Provincial Directors that demonstrated a commitment to peaceful resolution of conflicts during the shuras were asked to select leaders from their provinces for this program. Nine leaders from three provinces participated in one-month long training programs emphasizing conflict resolution strategies and negotiation methods. Since this training, the nine leaders have participated in numerous mediation and conflict resolution exercises, and have worked to develop multi-ethnic Peace Shuras. The PEACE project is actively monitoring the impact of this training effort through continual feedback. In addition, the same nine Kuchi leaders recently held their own conflict resolution workshops passing on some of the conflict resolution skills that they had been taught during the month-long training course to 51 additional Kuchi leaders.

As the word spread about the trainings provided by the project, PEACE began to receive requests for similar trainings, including one directly from President Karzai’s office through his Advisor on Tribal Affairs, Wahidullah Sabawoon. He requested that the project develop trainings aimed at resolving long-standing land disputes between the Kuchi and Hazara communities. Since 2008, the PEACE project has brought together over 300 Kuchi and non-Kuchi leaders from five regions to engage in joint conflict resolution workshops. Ten Peace Ambassadors (PAs) (i.e., 5 Kuchi and 5 Hazara) were selected to work at the community level to seek common ground and to resolve the Kuchi / Hazara conflicts over access to rangelands in the Hazarajat region (i.e., Besud). The PEACE project PAs are still engaged in this exercise with reports suggesting that a positive resolution is possible at the community level for many of the conflicts (Jacob et al., 2009).

The effectiveness of PEACE project accomplishments to date are directly related to its partnership with SDO. SDO’s ability to deliver peace-building messages within
the context and culture of the Afghan people was a critical component in training the Kuchi and other participants. By organizing these peace-building programs at the community level, SDO was also able to strengthen the capacity of community institutions of key district government offices, while promoting and encouraging the building of positive relationships among the actors. Moreover, because SDO focuses their own programs at the same levels (village and district for the community-based peace building program) both PEACE and SDO have mutually benefited from a partnership enabling efficient use of a research institution with NGO field-based strengths.

Practical Implications

PEACE conflict resolution workshops demonstrate that training and providing support to a few leaders has a multiplier effect as these leaders go on to train others in their own communities. Both at the community and governmental level, the interest in peaceful conflict resolution has been demonstrated and more widespread conflict resolution training is both possible and welcomed. The PEACE project’s investment in training and on-going support for shuras has proven to be an effective way to open up dialogue and encourage sustainable peace.

Livestock production, especially in extensive systems, is often complex and multi-faceted, and dependent on many components. To address improvements in livestock production in Afghanistan, the PEACE project is focusing primarily on information management through early warning and market information systems, conflict resolution, and capacity building. With a firm foundation now established in these areas, PEACE has begun the search for funding for a second phase and an additional four years of project activity. Phase 2 of the PEACE project is intended be more comprehensive, and will include intervention and development activities related to the risk management, economic diversification, and livelihood enhancement needs of the Kuchi.

PEACE recognizes, however, that there can be “no development without peace, and no peace without development.” All proposed activities targeting livestock production therefore, will continue to be enhanced and enabled through critical peace-building and conflict resolution workshops in partnership with SDO. Working within the context of the Kuchi’s current organizational structure and culture, PEACE and SDO have integrated existing and new methods to empower Kuchi leaders, attempting to build a large cohort who understand how and why it is best to solve problems peacefully and constructively. This comprehensive approach will allow PEACE to improve the social, economic and political environment in Afghanistan for the people, and through the people.

While village and Kuchi elders are in agreement that peaceful resolution is possible, greater emphasis should be placed on educating and influencing younger members of these groups to encourage appreciation for the benefits of peace and to give them the tools to mitigate conflicts. Further research is needed on how best to engage these younger members of Afghan society. The PEACE project’s model for conflict resolution has the capacity to be scaled-up to other areas experiencing violent conflict and should be expanded in order to better evaluate the model’s potential for replication.
Further Reading


About the Authors. Michael J. Jacobs is a Rangeland Ecologist and Chief of Party for the Afghanistan PEACE project through Texas A&M University. Email: mjacobs@cnrit.tamu.edu. Igor Naumovski is a Conflict Resolution specialist and worked with Kuchi and Hazara leaders for the Afghanistan PEACE project. Email: inaumovski.af@gmail.com. Catherine Schloeder is an Ecologist working for the Afghanistan PEACE project though Texas A&M University. Email: cschloeder@cnrit.tamu.edu. Raz Mohammad Dalili is the Executive Director of Sanayee Development Organization, an NGO devoted to Peace Building and Education in Afghanistan. Email: dalili_kabul@hotmail.com. Web: http://www.afghanpeace.org.

The Afghanistan PEACE project’s goal is to reduce the social and economic risks associated with extensive livestock production through better rangeland management information and peaceful resolution of land access issues. The PEACE project was established in 2006 and is led by Dr. Montague Demment, University of California, Davis, email: mwdemment@ucdavis.edu and Dr. Michael Jacobs, email: mjacobs@cnrit.tamu.edu.

The Global Livestock CRSP is comprised of multidisciplinary, collaborative projects focused on human nutrition, economic growth, environment and policy related to animal agriculture and linked by a global theme of risk in a changing environment. The program is active in East and West Africa, Central Asia and Latin America.

This publication was made possible through support provided by the Office of Agriculture, Bureau of Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade, under Grant No. PCE-G-00-98-00036-00 to University of California, Davis. The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID.

Edited by David Wolking & Susan L. Johnson