

IALC-USAID Sustainable Development of Drylands
Trip Report – Visit to Pakistan and Afghanistan
John W. Santas
October 30 – November 14, 2004

Purpose of Trip:

Plan year three (FY/CY 2005) of the Afghanistan/Pakistan component “Human Capacity Development for the Agriculture Sector in Afghanistan”.

Summary of Findings:

The primary purpose for this TDY was to make plans for year three (2005) of our Afghan Training Project. More specifically, we needed to concentrate on identifying and confirming the financial support that is needed to supplement core funds that are provided by the IALC/USAID Cooperative Agreement. Our objectives were achieved.

Our meetings with RAMP (Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Program) personnel in Kabul, to follow up on the job order that was submitted in late September, helped establish a better understanding of our past accomplishments in human capacity development and the need for continuing emphasis in this area. We have demonstrated that we can provide training support that is critical to the success of other projects in the RAMP portfolio. We are still waiting for a decision as to whether our CY 2005 job order in the amount of \$648,200 will be funded in part or entirely. This amount will come behind the \$400,000 in supplemental funding that was provided by RAMP for CY 2004.

Last year USAID-Islamabad showed little interest in providing supplemental support. Our achievements during the past year and the potential these training programs have demonstrated as a way to develop good-neighbor relationships between Afghanistan and Pakistan, seems to have attracted the attention of the Mission in Islamabad. We left with a verbal commitment of a \$474,000 buy-in to the Cooperative Agreement.

USDA has surfaced as another potential source of financial support. A meeting with the Agricultural Attaché for Pakistan and Afghanistan clearly signaled USDA’s interest in using local currency reserves to assist the NWFP-AU in their quest to gain recognition as a regional center of excellence in agricultural research and education.

Another opportunity that we uncovered is in working with the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT’s). These teams are operational in 16 provinces in Afghanistan. Each PRT includes an agriculture advisor provided by USDA. These USDA advisors are beginning to learn about the IALC/UIUC/NWFP-AU collection of resources and are making contact with our field office staff. Thus far the Nangarhar PRT has requested assistance with library materials and the Khost PRT has requested slots in 2005 short courses. The level of activity and interaction with the PRT’s will surely expand during the months ahead.

Another opportunity on the horizon is the inevitable move toward university development as part of the country-level strategy for Afghanistan. The IALC might want to position itself for the anticipated decision by funding agencies to upgrade one or more of the six universities in Afghanistan that offer programs of instruction in agriculture.

Air Routing:

Outbound: Champaign-Chicago (AA)-London-Heathrow (AA)-Islamabad (BA)-Kabul (PIA)

Inbound: Kabul-Islamabad (surface)-London-Heathrow (BA)-Chicago (AA)-Champaign (AA)

Summary of Activities:

Friday, October 29 - Departed Illinois

Saturday, October 30 – In transit through London

Sunday, October 31 – arrival in Islamabad

Day One, October 31

Traveling with Oval Myers, arrived Islamabad at 6:00 a.m., we were met by Field Office Director, Dr. Abdul Qayyum Khan and Project Assistant/Driver, Afzal Sher. We were transferred to the Serena Hotel. After a brief updating discussion with Dr. Qayyum we spent the day resting, having been in travel status for two days and two nights. That evening, we had dinner with Dr. Qayyum, his wife Ruby, son Shahab, their daughter Noreen and her five week old son, who is Qayyum and Ruby's first grandchild.

Day Two, November 1

Our three-person team prepared for an 11:00 a.m. meeting with USAID/Islamabad representative, Peter Duffy. This meeting had been arranged to discuss the "Proposal to Strengthen the NWFP Agricultural University" which had been submitted to USAID/Islamabad in December 2003. We were pleased to learn that the Islamabad Mission is ready to supplement our core funding with a buy-in amounting to approximately \$450,000. These funds can be used both in support of training programs for Afghanistan and in NWFP-AU strengthening activities. This was a complete reversal from the position taken by USAID/Islamabad when we contacted them last year with a buy-in request. The Mission has shown a growing interest in facilitating good-neighbor relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, as well as assisting the NWFP-AU to become a regional center of excellence in agricultural education and research. Mr. Duffy asked us to re-write our proposal so it will present a blend of training programs for Afghans and university strengthening activities, with a budget totaling about \$450,000.

We agreed to meet with Peter the evening of November 13 on our return from Kabul, to update him on our contacts with AID/Kabul and RAMP.

Day Three, November 2

Our three person team traveled to Peshawar by road with Afzal Sher as our driver. Sher continues to play a variety of roles in support of this component. After check in at the Pearl Continental Hotel, we drove to the NWFP-AU campus for a productive up-beat meeting with the Vice Chancellor, S. Iqbal Shah. He briefed us on a variety of accomplishments and achievements that make us proud of our affiliation with this university and our partnership in this Afghan Training Program. We discussed renewal of our Memorandum of Understanding and arrangements for his December visit to Illinois. Signing the new agreement is one of many activities planned during the December 12-19 period that the Vice-Chancellor and Dr. Qayyum will be in Illinois. Dr. Qayyum will stay until December 25 to work with us on writing assignments and other tasks that need to be completed. He then returns to Peshawar to receive the January 2005 group of 20 Afghans enrolling in M.Sc. programs at the AU.

Following our meeting with the VC, Dr. Qayyum had assembled a group 20 faculty members who have served in various capacities to deliver training programs to Afghans. Most in the group had served as lead instructors in the 12 short courses completed thus far, while some are serving as academic advisors to the M.Sc. students and/or providing other types of support to these degree participants. We engaged in a lively round-table discussion, with each person sharing reactions and impressions they had formed while working with the Afghan trainees. The theme that ran through their comments was one of enthusiasm about their university's role in this human resource development program and their dedication to the task of rebuilding the agriculture sector in Afghanistan. They repeatedly mentioned the insatiable desire for education that is characteristic of the Afghan trainees. These professors are ready to work with us during the months ahead in whatever capacity is needed.

Our next meeting was with the ten Afghans who entered M.Sc. programs at the NWFP-AU in August 2004. Five are from the Faculty of Agriculture at Kabul University and five are from the Faculty of Agriculture at Nangarhar University in Jalalabad. In most cases these individuals completed B.Sc. degrees at their respective universities within the past five to 10 years, after which they were employed as Instructor or Lecturers. They fully understand the staff re-building job that must be done at their universities and they are proud to be part of that process. They also understand and accept their being required to take deficiency courses and late afternoon English language courses. Everyone seems to recognize that completion of all M.Sc. degree requirements will take two and one-half years. Dr. Qayyum is available to them at all times to provide logistical, administrative and moral support as well as academic counseling. He is determined to see this group succeed. These students have very positive feelings about the NWFP-AU. At the conclusion of this meeting we shared a sense of pride and satisfaction in being part of the project that is giving them this educational opportunity.

This evening we were guests at an Iftar dinner hosted by the Vice Chancellor. This gave us an opportunity to socialize with a dozen other faculty and administrators who joined us for that event. Because our TDY came during the month of Ramadan, our hosts were fasting from dawn to dusk. An Iftar dinner is the traditional gathering to “break the fast”.

Day Four, November 3

We started the day by touring two facilities that are a source of pride to the university: The very modern central library and the recently-opened Institute of Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering. Impressive!

Having spent the previous day reviewing the degree training and organized short course portions of the Afghan training program, we turned our attention to the specialized, short-term scientist-to-scientist training. This is part of our “twinning” effort which pairs research stations in Afghanistan with selected stations/institutes in the NWFP. We started by meeting with the NWFP-AU Director General of Agricultural Research. He pledged full cooperation as we proceed to expand this type of training and increase numbers during 2005, building on the present level of 12 Afghan researchers who have thus far received this type of training in the NWFP.

Next we went to the Agricultural Research Institute at Tarnab, to review the specialized training that has been delivered there in the areas of Fruit and Vegetable Preservation and Soil Science/Soil Chemistry. A group of 25 researchers gathered in the conference room to comment on their interaction with Afghan research scientists thus far and offer their suggestions on our continuing efforts to deliver this training. We agreed that this type of training can be made more effective by having the Pakistani scientists travel to Afghanistan to spend periods of about one week advising their counterparts and planning cooperative research projects. The institute at Tarnab is anxious to cooperate with our training program and can deliver training in a wide range of areas, since it is the flagship station in the NWFP-AU research system.

On return to Peshawar, we made a courtesy call on the Chancellor of City University, Mohammad Asrar. Dr. Asrar was Registrar of the NWFP-AU during the early years of the TIPAN Project and is responsible for many of the accomplishments in which we all take pride. He has taken this prestigious assignment during his retirement years. Great Visit! That evening we had another Iftar dinner with the ten Afghan students. A sharp, industrious group; it was enjoyable and informative to socialize with them.

Day Five, November 4

We drove three hours north of Peshawar to Mingora, to visit another research station that recently provided specialized training in fruit and vegetable production to a group of five Afghan research scientists. Similar to our Tarnab visit, we expressed appreciation for the cooperation of station personnel, listened to their observations, and talked about future training programs. Here again, the Pakistani scientists are ready to work with their Afghan counterparts, both at their Mingora station and in Afghanistan, helping them deal

with their day-to-day problems. This station has the capacity to deliver very effective technical assistance and training, not only in fruits and vegetables, but also in rice, soybeans, mushroom production and various other commodities.

Later that day, we held a team meeting at the Serena Hotel and worked on revisions to the buy-in proposal we have been discussing with USAID/Islamabad.

Day Six, November 5

After an overnight in Mingora, we made the four hour drive back to Islamabad. The remainder of the day was used to catch up on email, work on the trip report, and prepare for departure to Kabul and week two of our TDY.

Day Seven, November 6

Lots of discussion within our team as we prepare for our week in Afghanistan and the 1:30 flight from Islamabad to Kabul. After arrival in Kabul and transfer to the Assa 2 Guest House (same location used last year), we settled in at our new location.

Day Eight, November 7

After a brief stop at Mercy Corps-Afghanistan to see the office used by Mr. Md. Agha Jabarkhil, our Kabul-based contact, we went to the RAMP office for a 9:00 a.m. meeting. We were now operating as a team of four, having been joined by Mr. Agha.

In a meeting led by Tim Mooney, Project Supervisor and Acting Chief of Party, we were able to interact with a cross-section of RAMP Project personnel. Mr. Mooney informed us that a thorough review of the current RAMP portfolio of 40-50 projects (Job Orders) would be conducted during the Eid holiday break (November 14-21) as they strive to meet some very ambitious goals that were established when the RAMP contract was awarded to Chemonics International Inc.

Mr. Mooney plans to call an early December meeting of project managers (Dr. Qayyum in our case) to stimulate and generate as much coordination as possible among the portfolio of RAMP-funded projects. We responded to a range of questions coming from all RAMP staff, relative to training activities completed and planned activities during Job Order # 2 i.e. CY 2005. We came away feeling that our job order will meet important needs and stay in the RAMP portfolio. The M.Sc. training that we are continuing to offer seems to be especially valued. Many needs were identified that NWFPAU resources can meet. It seemed a coincidence that RAMP is also interested in having AU professors and research scientists come to Afghanistan to work with Afghan agriculturists in an on-the-job, one-on-one training mode. We informed them that our Pakistani colleagues were anxious to serve in exactly that capacity, so they could better understand the in-country needs and deliver better training programs. The importance of emphasizing "High Value Crops" is another point made by RAMP personnel and by our cooperators in Pakistan.

Mr. Mooney informed us that we should receive notice after about two weeks as to whether our job order would be approved as submitted or if revisions would be requested.

Following the RAMP meeting our next appointment was with Mohammad Yasin Mohsini, Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture at Kabul University. Dean Mohsini very effectively involved his staff in this meeting, especially past participants in our short courses, as he briefed us on progress and developments within his faculty since our visit one year ago. One specific item he mentioned was the library development component being led by Barbara Hutchinson and Atifa Rawan at the University of Arizona. He expressed hope that this component could provide training to the library staff in his faculty. He is determined to visit the AU-Peshawar in the near future along with selected department heads, to initiate an active exchange with that university. It was especially gratifying to hear positive feedback from Dean Mohsini's staff who had attended 2004 short courses that had been conducted both in Kabul and in Peshawar. Another contingent of Kabul University lecturers has been selected to enroll in M.Sc. programs at the AU in January 2005, joining the five lecturers currently there for graduate study.

We returned to the Guest House to send an email to Nancy Kobel at UIUC, informing her that Mr. Dzierwa and Mr. Anwari of the RAMP Contracts Office had agreed to substitute OMB documents for the existing Attachment 2.4, as the set of guidelines to control financial reporting and accountability. It was a full and productive day.

Day Nine, November 8

Our first stop was at USAID/Kabul, with offices in a new compound across the street from the U.S. Embassy. A meeting had been arranged with Dr. Barry Primm, Deputy Mission Director, and Mr. Albert Merkel, Acting CTO for Agriculture, while Dan Miller was on vacation. Dr. Primm and Mr. Merkel had served in the Pakistan Mission during the initial years of our TIPAN project. As such, they were Dr. Qayyum's colleagues and old friends. We knew they would be interested in the outcome of the TIPAN Project and would be glad to know that the institution created by that project was now meeting critical human resource development needs in Afghanistan. We were surprised to discover that Scott Christiansen was on TDY in Kabul (standing in for Dan Miller) and delighted that he could join our meeting. Mr. Christiansen is gradually taking over John Wilson's responsibilities as the CTO in AID/Washington for the IALC Cooperative Agreement. Scott helped us explain the IALC/ANE Cooperative Agreement that supports our training project and joined us in detailing the achievements to date as well as the potential this component holds for building human capacity during the next few years. This was a lively, informative meeting; but too short.

Next we visited the Darul Amaan Research Station near Kabul to meet with returned participants from various IALC/UIUC training programs. The group consisted of four individuals who had received specialized training in maize breeding at the NWFP Cereal Crops Research Institute in Pirsabak, five who had gone to ARS-Mingora for immersion training in their fruit and vegetable research programs, two others who had received intensive training in soil chemistry and soil analysis at ARI-Tarnab and another group of

three who had been among the 20 participants in an organized short course on Post-Harvest Handling of Fruits and Vegetables. All appreciated the contribution that these training opportunities made to their professional improvement, but it became clear that much still must be done to compensate for the many years during which they did not have access to the scientific community and counterparts in their fields of research.

At the suggestion of Mr. Merkel, we returned to RAMP to meet with Susan DeCamp, their Communication Specialist. We provided her with the information needed to prepare a worldwide cable that will tell the story of USAID gaining a handsome return on an investment made in institution-building through the TIPAN project 20 years ago. It will be interesting to see where this story might surface. The remainder of the day was used to catch up on email and work on the trip report.

Day 10, November 9

It is important to visit the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry (MAAH) and update Deputy Minister M. Sharif on an annual basis, so that became our first stop. From his key position in the Government of Afghanistan, Minister Sharif gives Dr. Qayyum support and assistance on an “as-needed” basis. He is using our training programs to improve the technical qualifications of personnel in his Ministry. Mr. Sharif understands that our training slots must be evenly and widely distributed; leaving only limited opportunities for Ministry representatives. That morning Minister Sharif was chairing a seminar on the potential for soybeans in Afghanistan and was especially pleased that Prof. Myers could contribute a presentation on soybean production to that seminar.

Having discovered that Scott Christiansen was in Kabul, we adjusted plans so that our team could spend the afternoon with him. Mr. Christiansen is the principal contact in USAID/ANE for the IALC Cooperative Agreement. It is important to keep him informed on activities within this component and to receive advice from his level. When we reached the AID Mission for our meeting with Scott, we also had the opportunity to talk with Howard Anderson, the Agricultural Attaché from Islamabad, who was spending a few days in Kabul. Our group spent three hours engaged in lively discussion. Howard is relatively new at his post and is more interested in agricultural development efforts than is the case with most agricultural attachés, so he was anxious to get information on TIPAN, the NWFP-AU and our Afghan Training project. He also gave us details on an assortment of possibilities for USDA funding to strengthen the NWFP-AU. Another topic we touched on was the possibility of Qayyum’s involvement in the workshop that Scott is organizing as part of the International Agribusiness Management Association Meeting in Chicago in June 2005. At Scott’s invitation we stayed in the AID compound for dinner and had the opportunity for a brief visit with Mission Director, Patrick Fine. We were impressed that Director Fine was knowledgeable and conversant on our training activities. He keeps himself well informed.

It was an enjoyable and informative afternoon/evening that covered a wide range of topics related to agricultural development and Illinois project activity, both past and present, in the region. It was pure serendipity that Scott happened to be in Kabul.

Day 11, November 10

Realizing the importance of seeing and knowing some of Afghanistan outside Kabul, we took advantage of an opportunity for travel to Mazar-e-Sharif. This opportunity came through an NGO known as NEI (Nutrition Education International). NEI wanted Prof. Myers to present a seminar on soybean production in Mazar. They knew that our threesome also wanted to visit the Faculty of Agriculture at Balkh University, which is located in that city. NEI had arranged for our travel from Kabul to Mazar via UN plane. We arrived there at midday, settled in at the Global Partners guest house and proceeded to the seminar site. It was indeed an enlightening experience to attend this seminar and observe a room full of farmers from Balkh Province discussing soybean production with Professor Myers. The seminar was held in a conference room at a hotel and concluded with dinner at the hotel. An interesting day.

Day 12, November 11

Departed the guest house at 8:30 am for our half-day visit to Balkh University, which began with discussions in the Chancellor's office. The Chancellor informed us that this was a relatively new university (only 18 years old), with the physical plant having been constructed by the Russians. They are however, in the process of developing a new campus on the edge of the city. In our discussions, the Chancellor made passing reference to "An American Government Promise of Financial Assistance to the Faculty of Agriculture at Their University".

We moved from the Chancellor's office to the Office of the Dean of Agriculture. He explained that of 3,000 students enrolled in Balkh University, 300 were agriculture students, of which 20 were women. Fifteen professors make up the Faculty of Agriculture and three of these are female. Twelve of his professors gathered in the office for our discussions. They explained that five hold M.S. degrees (from Russia, Germany and India) with the others holding B.S. level qualifications. Two of the B.S. level faculty have been nominated to begin M.Sc. programs at the NWFP-AU in January 2005. They were present for our meeting. Also present were three of the staff who had participated in short courses conducted by our project. Those courses were: Integrated Pest Management, Animal Nutrition and Post Harvest Handling. They made glowing comments about the value of these short courses. One of their most positive comments was about the value of being able to network and interact with fellow participants, who were members of their discipline, and came from all geographic regions of Afghanistan.

There was a strong plea for help in upgrading their university from everyone in the room. The Dean referred specifically to a promise made the previous month of \$150,000 for his Faculty, by George White who represented the U.S. Embassy and visited their campus. It is clear that expectations are building for university development as part of the U.S. reconstruction effort in Afghanistan. This was a frank, informative discussion that definitely made it worth our trip to Mazar-e-Sharif.

Day 13, November 12

Having returned from Mazar the previous evening, we used our Friday (because offices are closed) to work on the proposal requested by Peter Duffy, so it can be delivered to him on arrival in Islamabad. We have reason to believe that this year our request for a buy-in from USAID Islamabad will materialize.

Day 14, November 13

At mid-morning we learned that our 3:00 p.m. departure on PIA to Islamabad had been cancelled. Qayyum quickly made arrangements for us to travel by road. Although we arrived in Islamabad later than planned, Peter Duffy was waiting for us at the Serena Hotel. Fortunately, we had transmitted our proposal to him electronically the day before. He had reviewed those materials and suggested a few minor revisions which he would like to have finalized before Thanksgiving. Basically, he wants us to use Islamabad buy-in funds to cover the training costs portion of five short courses in 2005, while using core funds to cover the travel, lodging and per diem portions of those same five courses. Following these revisions, Mr. Duffy will process a traditional, direct buy-in amounting to approximately \$475,000. Our proposal is attached to this report. A productive end to a long day.

Day 15, November 14

Left the hotel at 6:00 a.m. for the Islamabad/London/Chicago/Champaign return trip, which covered nearly 24 hours, but went right on schedule.