



Interface between State and Society in Afghanistan

**Discussion on Key Social Features affecting Governance,
Reconciliation and Reconstruction**

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February 2005

SUMMARY

The two main concepts analyzed in the Interface between State and Society discussion paper are the notions of "*qawm*" and "*manteqa*" which are common characteristics of the Afghan society. The paper discusses the implication of these notions in the relation between the State and the Society as a central issue of governance and reconstruction. It poses the question on how to get "*there*" at the local level and implement government policies:

- The discussion paper hypothesis is that the failure of successive government administration in Afghanistan is partly due to a failed interface between the State apparatus and the Society. Therefore, the form of interaction between the new government and the Afghan society will determine how successful this administration will perform as compared to the previous ones.
- The Afghan society is structured in "*qawm*" or "networks" which have taken an international dimension over the past 25 years of war. **The "*qawm*" had a dual effect in Afghanistan's history**; on the one hand it has prevented the central government to promote modernity while on the other hand it has been a crucial "social capital" for the resilience of the Afghan society to external shocks such as war, drought and failed governance. However, shaped by "*qawm*", the Afghan society is a "fragmented network society" which is resulting in poor "socio-political" representation of its members.
- Beside the concept of "*qawm*", the place/region from where a person is originating/living or the "*manteqa*" **is an element shaping identity and solidarity** in Afghanistan. The paper shows through a case study and more generally field observations throughout the country that the "*manteqa*" is the actual social and territorial unit of rural Afghanistan. A "*manteqa*" is composed of several villages or cluster settlements/hamlets where solidarity is shaped amongst the local population.
- **The "*manteqa*" do not have administrative recognition**, although traditional structures/committees exist at the "*manteqa*" level (i.e. "*shura-e manteqa*", "*rish safedan-e manteqa*", "*nomayendagan-e manteqa*" or "*shura-e mahali*").
- The administrative structure of the government of Afghanistan is divided into provinces, districts and villages. However, **no mapping or listing have captured the complexity of villages in Afghanistan**, so much the notion of village is unclear and bound to a variety of interpretation. This lack of clear interface has hampered the interaction between the State and the Society in the past. **The "*manteqa*" and their committee are the missing interactive links between the district administration and the settlement/hamlet.**
- From preliminary work in identifying "*manteqa*", the author estimates that the **total number of "*manteqa*" in Afghanistan is probably in the range of 3,000 to 4,000**. A number which is indeed far easier to support than 20,000 to 40,000 settlements/villages or NSP (National Solidarity Program) *shura* of various size and nature.

The paper recommends promoting ownership of the Afghan society over public affairs at local level through a process of strengthening representative local organizations or "*shura*" at appropriate level. The "*manteqa*" level seems adapted as it reflects the underlying social structure of rural Afghanistan.

Beside "governance" and "reconstruction" issues, the paper raises other more outstanding matter, which is the question of "reconciliation". The promotion of structures promoting representation of population at local level can indeed play a significant role to the reconciliation process of Afghanistan.

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1. Introduction

Virtually all the Afghan leaders since the early 19th century had known the fate of either being assassinated or forced into exile. From 1978 on-ward Afghanistan had experienced the Soviet invasion and undergone two and half decades of resistance and civil war. Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, has been destroyed by the political warring factions in three years of civil strifes and since the early 1990s four different regimes have controlled the capital, ruling only bits and pieces of Afghanistan. Beyond the bad news for “would be” presidents of Afghanistan, the poor records express the continuous failure of the Afghan State to establish positive interface with the society. Worst the State had alienated the society when attempting to control it, resulting in the dramatic fate of the Afghan nation. The “Iron Amir” Abder Rahman, King of Afghanistan between 1880 and 1901 - but also the founder of Afghanistan as a nation-state - nicknamed his country “*Yaghestan*”¹ or “Land of the Insolent”, “Land of Rebellion” or “Land of Freedom”.

In order to extend the control of the society, the government divided the country in provinces, themselves subdivided in districts or “*uluswali*”, The government or “*hokumat*” notes Olivier Roy², differentiated itself significantly from the society; Western style clothing, administrative languages and expressions, etc. An intermediary was therefore necessary to communicate. The head of a village, “*malek*”, “*qariadar*”, “*khan*”, “*kad khida*” or “*arbab*”

represented the community to the State (at district level) and vice versa the State to the community.

The difficulty of any pre-war Government in Afghanistan was that the Afghan society had no limited territory and power structures on which the State could adopt a strategy to take possession. The Afghan society was not feudal. The power structure in the Afghan society was not a defined place or person, but a multitude of elusive and constantly renegotiated networks or “*qawms*”. While the State apparatus tried to delineate village communities that can be managed by the headmen (“*malek*”, “*qariadar*”, “*khan*”, “*kad khida*” or “*arbab*”), the society responded by trying to link its “*qawms*” to the State apparatus in order to access resources. Favoritism and corruption had constituted effective forms of rejection of the government by the society. Roy notes that the “*jihad*” has been declared when this government, judged non-believer, could not be infiltrated any longer by the “*qawm*”.

However, more than two decades of war had profoundly re-shaped the Afghan society and new structures have emerged. On the one hand, the war, by resulting in massive migrations had internationalized the Afghan “*qawm*” rendering them even more elusive and self-reliant. On the other hand, at local level, the society had been reshaped around new leaders that have emerged with the war; the commanders and their fragmented territorial authority.

So-far, the new administration of the transitional afghan government has characterized itself by anything but very limited interactions. The last FAO/WFP

¹ See, Mike Barry, “*Le Royaume de l’insolence - la résistance afghane, du Grand Moghol à l’invasion soviétique*”, 1984

² Olivier Roy, “*L’Afghanistan: Islam et modernité politique*”, Coll. Esprit/Seuil, 1985.

report³ notes that “payments of salaries to civil servants have become more regularized albeit still with delays in the provinces. But there has been virtually no non-salary spending in the provinces, resulting in a less effective interface between the government and population”. The report states further that “one of the immediate challenges is to sharply increase reconstruction funding and the share of such funding going through government budget channels and in support of national priorities, while further improving the alignment of continuing humanitarian assistance with government leadership and the National Development Framework (NDF)”.

The form of interaction between the new government and the Afghan society will determine how successful this administration will perform as compared to the previous ones. This short paper aims at contributing to the development of an effective interface between State and society in Afghanistan.

³ FAO/WFP, “*Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission to Afghanistan (CFSAM)*”, 13 August 2003. www.fao.org

2. The notions of “Qawm” and “Manteqa”

2.1 Afghanistan or a Society structured in “Qawm”

The Afghan society had to organize itself for the last 2 decades without the presence of a functional government. Indeed, the war and the collapse of the State structure in Afghanistan strengthened the solidarity networks or “qawm”⁴ in which resources are channelled along social lines. Before the war, several observers already noted the antagonist relations between the “qawm” and the State structures. Observers during the Soviet war⁵ showed that the traditional society and its networks were more effective than the military resistance to the penetration of the central government at different level of the society⁶. The organization and functioning of the “qawm” in relation of the drought and the Taliban regime is little studied, but it was certainly essential to the resilience of the Afghan society to external stresses and failed governance.

“Qawm” are on one hand hampering government/administration initiative to govern and promote modernity in the country and on the other hand it is an essential “social capital” for the resilience of the Afghan society to

external shocks and failed governance. It should be noted here that “traditional” is not necessarily “tribal”, since not all the Afghan society is tribal (Tajik farmers, urbanized population, merchants, etc.). However, the entire Afghan society is structured by social networks⁷ (“qawm”)⁸.

In rural areas, the society structure is tribal (Pashtun, Hazara) or arranged around family lineages. The strongest form of solidarity is therefore tribal or along family lineage, but other forms of solidarity may also exist. Therefore, the “qawm” in rural Afghanistan relates mostly to family/clan relations. In town, the society is more diverse and social relations/reciprocities may be across family lineages. Solidarity networks are related to lineage, but may also be related to profession (trade corporation, merchants, people involved in smuggling, etc.), to life experience (i.e same school, same group of Mujahedeen, Taleban, etc.). The stronger is the identification of individuals to the identity of a certain social group, the more cohesive is the

⁴ The first presentation of the concept of “qawm” was presented by Pierre Centlivres in 1972; “*Un bazaar d’Asie Centrale: forme et organisation du bazaar de Tashkurghan (Afghanistan)*”; Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert.

⁵ During the Soviet war, Afghan referred to the freed zones by commanders by the term “Djai ke Hokumat ne’s” or “the places were there is no government”.

⁶ See Roy, O. “*Afghanistan : la guerre des paysans*”, in : *Révoltes logiques*, No13, 1981 ; and Roy, O. “*L’Afghanistan: Islam et modernité politique*”, Coll. Esprit/Seuil, 1985.

⁷ See Centlivres, P., Centlivres-Demont, M., “*Et si on parlait d’Afghanistan?*”, Neuchâtel, Ed. Inst. Ethnologie, paris, 1988; Roy, O., “*Groupes de Solidarité au Moyen-Orient et en Asie centrale*”, Paris, Les cahiers du CERI, 1996 and Centlivres, P., Centlivres-Demont, M., “*L’anthropologue face à l’humanitaire. Etat, Islam et tribus face aux organisations internationales. Le cas de l’Afghanistan 1978-1998*”, in *Annales HSS*, No4, pp.945-965, 1999.

⁸ The best practical illustration of this social reality is the tendency of UN, NGO and government offices to have local staffs originating from the same part of Afghanistan.

solidarity network. The notion of “*qawm*” is in the first place an identity referential. Given the various forms and level of solidarity (from the extended family to ethnic nationality or the supra national “*umma*”/Islamic community), the “*qawm*” are intricate structures.

The concept of “*qawm*” is here understood in its broadest sense of solidarity networks and may need to be complemented by the notion of “*rabithâ*” in order to capture all the possible solidarities within the Afghan society⁹.

Shaped by “*qawm*”, the Afghan society is a “fragmented network society” in which individuals keep referring to different level of self-representation (familial, tribal, national, local, religious, etc.) in order to adapt to changing situations. The fragmentation of the Afghan society and its vertical/international network links makes it a challenge (if not hardly impossible) to understand livelihood, to target assistance and for any authority to rule. Moreover, the fragmented social reality of Afghanistan is resulting in poor “socio-political” representation of members of the society.

⁹ The term of “*rabithâ*” seems to apply generally at a lower level than the “*qawm*” and rather relates to micro-level solidarities. The term “*rabithâ*” includes family relations and all other relations not considered to be “*qawm*” relations by Afghans. Therefore, an Afghan could express the following “*rabithâ*” solidarities: “*rabithâ-e family*” (family relations), “*rabithâ-e ham classî*” (from the same school), “*rabithâ-e qalahwali*” (from the same “*qala*” or fort/fortress), “*rabithâ-e ham qariah*” (from the same village), “*rabithâ-e ham kar*” (from the same profession), “*rabithâ-e hezbi*” (from the same political party), “*rabithâ-e Al Qaida*” or even “*rabithâ-e qawm*” (from the same “*qawm*”).

By comparison, Afghans could say that they belong the “*qawm*” of a given living area or “*manteqa*” (e.g. “*qawm-e Dah Mardah*”, “*qawm-e Sang-e masha*”, “*qawm-e Hutqol*”; see case study of Jaghori district below) or religious groups “*qawm-e Sayyed*”. These “*qawm*” affiliations are composed of patrilineal relations between the members of the “*qawm*”. However, Afghans could also say that they belong to “ethnic *qawm*” such as “*qawm-e Pashtu*”, “*qawm-e Tajik*”, “*qawm-e Uzbek*”, “*qawm-e Hazara*”, “*qawm-e Kizilbach*”, etc... or that they belong to “regional *qawm*” such as “*qawm-e Panjshiri*”, “*qawm-e Shomali*”: “*qawm-e Farah*”, “*qawm-e Jawzjan*” etc... These perceived solidarity networks can go up to the national level and Afghans would talk of “*qawm-e Irani*”, “*qawm-e Englisi*”, “*qawm-e Hindustani*”, etc... The use of the word “*qawm*” made by Afghans clearly goes beyond the tribal or patrilineal affiliations.

2.2 The place of living or the “Manteqa”

Rural Afghanistan is composed of thousand of villages, which no mapping have yet captured its complexity. Moreover, the notion of “village” itself is unclear in Afghanistan and can lead to a variety of interpretations (see Annex II). Afghans are generally referring to the “*manteqa*” as their place of living and their main identity referential.

The “*manteqa*”¹⁰ which literally means “area” or “region”, is a group of settlements/hamlets of heterogeneous size (“*qaria*”, “*âghel*”, “*deh*”, “*kalay*”, “*banda*” or “*qishlaq*”) that are commonly identified by its inhabitants, or other communities, under a single name. Somewhere, between the district and the settlements/hamlets, the “*manteqa*” do not have administrative recognition, but represent the actual social and territorial unit of rural Afghanistan (on the district, see Annex I). The “*manteqa*” may sometime refer to lineages, but not necessarily as solidarity can also be maintained by the proximity of various people living in the same area¹¹. The notion of village should refer to the settlement/hamlet - “*qaria*”, “*âghel*”, “*deh*”, “*kalay*”, “*bonda*” or “*qishlaq*” while the “*manteqa*” refers to a group of people sharing a common identity, which shapes the solidarity space. The “*manteqa*” also refers to the smaller unit where agriculture production is organized. The irrigation systems, by creating reciprocity links amongst users, are the most standard and frequently recurring variable among the various

criteria used to define a “*manteqa*”¹². It is at the “*manteqa*” level that communal structures exist such as the bazaar and the school¹³ that shape solidarity among the resident population.

However, field experiences shows that local perception of the boundaries of a “*manteqa*” in the sense of “area” or “region” may vary depending on the considerations involved in the definition. For instance pastureland/rangeland access, irrigation structures (i.e. larger size than existing social groups) and social groups may represent different level of identification of a “region”. Also, boundaries between “*manteqa*” may be disputed at the local level between various population groups.

The *manteqa* or the hidden structures of rural Afghanistan have been shaped during two and half decades of war and provided military commanders their smallest base of legitimacy. The main social structure changes with the war are a) a simplification of the social structures at local level with the elimination of the *qawm* opposed to those of local commanders and b) the contraction/alignment of social groups with a defined geographical space at local level; the *manteqa*. These adjustments, although incomplete, were often enforced with extreme violence. These adjustments, although incomplete, were often enforced with extreme violence.

¹⁰ Also called “*allaqah*” or “*sahah*” in Southern Afghanistan and “*nahya*”, “*guzar*” or “*mahala*” in urban areas.

¹¹ From Alessandro Monsutti, author of “*Guerres et migrations: réseaux sociaux et stratégies économiques des Hazaras d’Afghanistan*”, Neuchâtel: Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines (thèse de doctorat), Switzerland, 2003, p. 492.

¹² Frédéric Roussel, “*Contraintes et perspectives dans le contexte actuel pour l’élaboration d’une stratégie de réhabilitation immédiate des zones rurales afghans*”, UNORSA, Peshawar, Juin 1993.

¹³ In Central Afghanistan such public places are called “*membar-o omumi*”.

In other word, the notion of “*manteqa*” lies at a specific level of the intricate structure of the “*qawm*” that happen to have a territorial basis while otherwise the very notion of “*qawm*”/social group network tend to be non-territorial. In the past 25 years, it also happened that the actors of the Afghan wars had strengthened this territoriality of the “*manteqa*”.

Therefore, though, the Afghan society is fragmented and organized in “*qawm*”, there are territorial social patterns or “units” which have been mostly shaped during the war that can be recognized and strengthen. Field work demonstrated that “*manteqa*” is a social reality throughout Afghanistan.

Preliminary quantitative work conducted by the author on “*social groups*” suggests that the total number of “*manteqa*” in Afghanistan probably lies in the range of 3,000 to 4,000.

The various Afghan governments have utilized the concept of “*qawm*” to negotiate with various tribes, clans, and regional leaders that were potentially hostile in order to control them, or sometime by keeping power balances between various groups. It is the NGOs in the past 15 years that have experienced working with local social groups at “*manteqa*” level and build more or less successfully committees representing resident population (see chapter 3 below).

2.3 Case Study in Jaghori District

In Jaghori district ¹⁴ (south-west of Ghazni province), the number of “*manteqa*” are not rigid. NGOs, such as Shuhada Organization or Avicenne have listed 25 “*manteqa*” in Jaghori; Almetu, Anguri, Bâbâ, Busayd, Chilbâghtu-ye Oqi, Chilbâghtu-ye Pashi, Dahmarda, Dâwud, Haydar, Hecha, Hutqol, Kamrak, Lumân, Maska, Pâtu, Sang-e Mâsha, Sapâya ou Khodaydâd, Sa’id Ahmad, Shashpar, Sherzayda, Shoghla, Siyâ Zamin ou Posht-e Chob, Taberghân, Ulyatu, Zerak.

Some “*manteqa*” bear the name of tribal segments such as Dahmarda, Maska or Baba, while other designates only the name of a location such as Sang-e Masha or Hutqol. Alessandro Monsutti¹⁵ notes that in some “*manteqa*”, the

population is from the same tribal affiliation, while in others, the population is mixed (i.e Sang-e Masha). However, Monsutti shows that the “*manteqa*” endogamy in Central Afghanistan is high with 70% of the marriage made within the “*manteqa*” and 30% outside. Monsutti also notes that when a marital union is made outside of the “*manteqa*” it is generally to reactivate ancient strategic alliances between families.

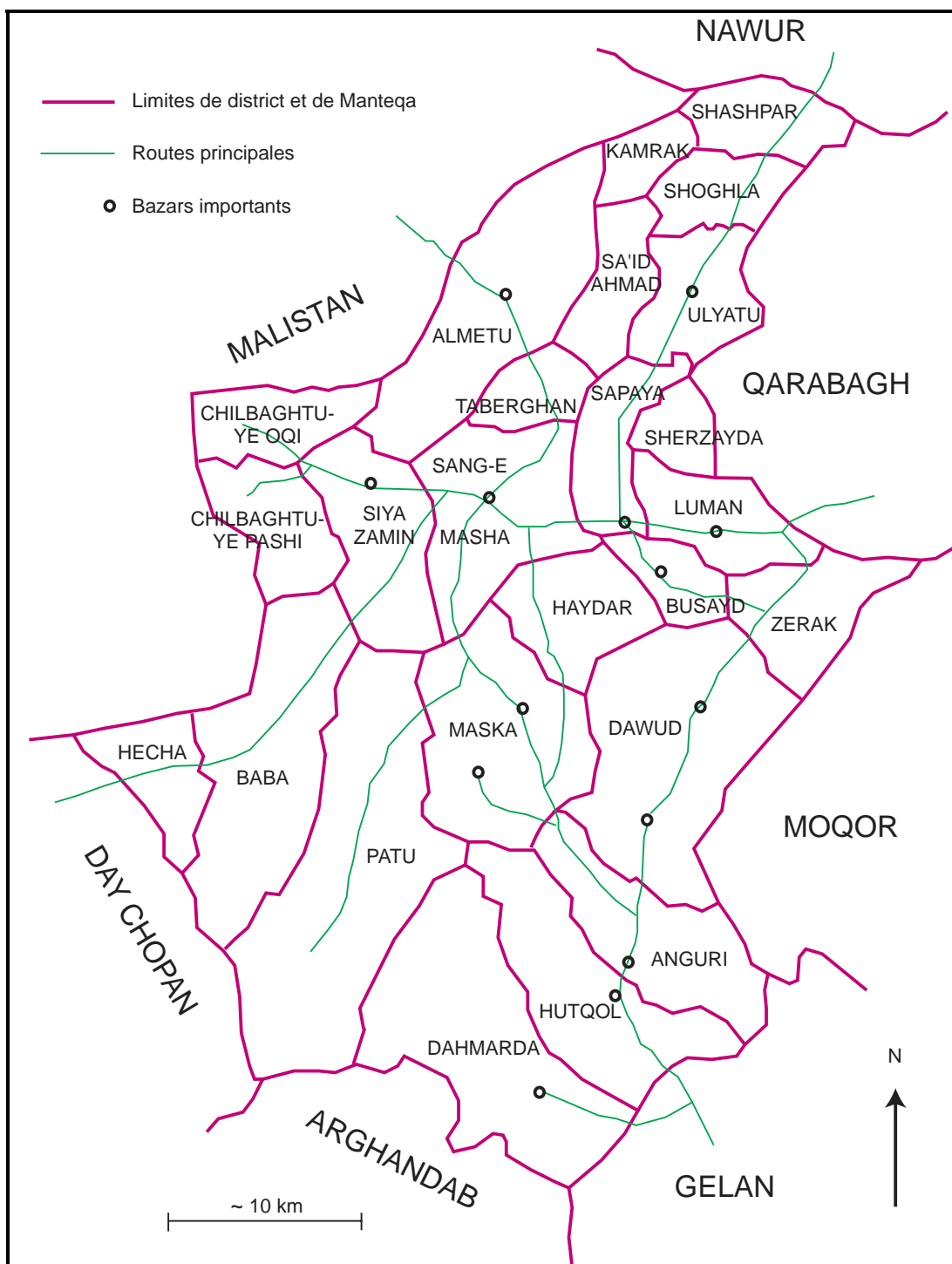
Monsutti conducted a study on the social structure in Jaghori district of Ghazni province and mapped the various “*manteqa*” of Jaghori district (see figure 1). According to Monsutti¹⁶, it would take approximately a week/10 days for an experienced team to define (and map), through a grass-root consultation, the various “*manteqa*” within a district.

¹⁴ This case study is discussed in detail in Alessandro Monsutti, *op. cit.*, 2003.

¹⁵ Alessandro Monsutti, *op. cit.*, 2003.

¹⁶ Pers. Communication.

Figure 1
Maps of the “*manteqa*” of Jaghori district (Ghazni province).¹⁷



¹⁷ Alessandro Monsutti, *op. cit.*, 2003.

3. Working with “*Shura-e Manteqa*” or Communal Councils

In the absence of a functioning Afghan government, NGOs have worked directly with “local groups” in the past 15 years or more and gained significant experience on how to interact with these “local groups” aiming at reaching best possible impacts. NGOs have looked for representative of local groups and created “*shura*”¹⁸ for the implementation of their programs. When successful, these “*shura*” are composed of generally young individuals selected for their competences and as much as possible representing various population groups involved in NGO programs. They are in some sense local committees of “developers” trained by NGOs. A new social phenomenon in the Afghan society! These “*shura*” differs significantly from the traditional gathering of “*jirga*” or “*maraka*” called under the authority of influential individuals when tribal/clan conflicts are negotiated or important public issues are to be solved.

The creation of “community development councils” proposed under the National Solidarity Program (NSP)¹⁹ and implemented by more than 20 Implementing Partners is a key effort to reinforce participation of members of the society in building their own capacity to engage in “community development”²⁰.

¹⁸ The term “*shura*” bears a religious dimension as it originally means a gathering of religious leaders.

¹⁹ The NSP (or *Hambastige Millie*) was one of the AIA’s first and top priority development programmes. The NSP was announced within the context of the presentation of the National Development Framework (NDF) in April 2002 and is financed by the World Bank.

²⁰ The Afghanistan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) has

However, the selection of “community development councils” does not necessarily reflect the underlying social structures in a given district. Therefore, the representation of these councils may not mirror the social realities which could result in sub-optimal identification of needs and use of resources.

In Bamyan, one of the most dynamic “community forum/*shura*” is the “*shura*” of Shaheedan “*manteqa*”. The “*shura*” is a model as it has one central “*shura-e manteqa*” – also called “*shura-e mahali*”²¹, “*rish safedan-e manteqa*”²², “*nomayendagan-e manteqa*”²³ or “*mojtamay-e khidamatee*”²⁴ or and which could be best called “communal council”²⁵ - and number smaller satellite “*shura*” in each village/settlements²⁶. The “*shura-e manteqa*” is composed of representative selected in each of the satellite “*shura*”. WFP in partnership with an Afghan NGO conducted a Food for Asset Creation program²⁷ through the “*shura-e manteqa*” of Shaheedan. In July 2002, a joint survey was conducted in Shaheedan with the “*shura-e*

contracted 22 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and UN-Habitat to facilitate the delivery of the National Solidarity Program (NSP) in all provinces of Afghanistan.

²¹ This is the most commonly used term. “*mahal*” is an Arabic word which means “*location*”, “*area*”, “*manteqa*”.

²² Council of white beard of a “*manteqa*”.

²³ Representatives of a “*manteqa*”.

²⁴ Community Forum generally established by NGOs.

²⁵ This translation is visionary as “communes” as such do not exist in Afghanistan.

²⁶ It should be noted that the Shaheedan “*shura*” in Bamyan was created during the Taliban rule.

²⁷ PSD, Partners for Social Development, “*Shaheedan Irrigation and Water Supply*”, Project Proposal Document.

manteqa" and it was agreed that the 18 villages of Shaheedan would receive assistance to build wells and latrines, to clean irrigation canals and to repair a road section.

In November, the elders in Shaheedan reported to the Afghan NGO that 15 more villages of the same area are newly participating in the "*shura-e manteqa*", bringing the total number of villages in Shaheedan to 33. Some of these "new" villages were actually visited and had similar number of HH than the one having representatives in the "*shura*"²⁸. These villages never had any representation in the "*shura-e manteqa*" and were therefore excluded from previous free food distribution, FoodAC²⁹ and any other programs implemented in Shaheedan. The Shaheedan case study shows that mechanisms to reinforce representation of population groups in the socio-political arena needs to be reinforced.

However, by January 2005 the NSP had left its foot steps in Shaheedan; the "communal council" or "*shura-e Manteqa*" of Shaheedan had been dissolved. In its place, the NSP has created a number of new "community development councils" at village/hamlet level pulling together households³⁰ through which NSP resources are channelled. As a result, the representative structure of a social group ("*shura-e manteqa*" and its satellite "*shura*") which was under construction over the past several years had been swept away. As the newly created "community development councils" are receiving assistance directly from the Central Government

through NGOs³¹ the new councils representatives do not feel any longer the need to further cooperate with their social group at the "*manteqa*" level. They can operate autonomously for a while. Yet, the "*manteqa*" level remains the privileged level where public and governance issues can be addressed such as education, health promotion, security, reconciliation, road maintenance, markets development or natural resources management such as water, pastureland. While the NSP approach is "community building", the program is instead resulting in a further fragmentation of the Afghan society. Through the resources the NSP is pouring in the country, the program is creating social changes which have not been anticipated by the initiators. In the first place, the NSP did not define what social groups are in Afghanistan³².

²⁸ The author conducted a monitoring and evaluation of this joint WFP/PSD program in November 2002.

²⁹ Food for Assets Creation.

³⁰ Minimum of 25 households for each "community development councils".

³¹ In sub-contracting the program to NGOs, the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) is by-passing provincial and district administration. Local authorities are needed to address public issues and as they have not been consulted they do not systematically support NSP implementation and often suffer from a lack of awareness regarding the various aspect of the NSP.

³² The NSP Operation Manual states the followings: "Communities will be defined on the basis of existing available information from government records (e.g. the list of registered villages from the 1970s, or the list of villages prepared for the nomination of the members of the 2002 *Loya Jirga*)... the minimum size of a community potentially eligible for a block grant allocation would be 25 families. Smaller settlements should be encouraged to join with other ones... Where this is not possible, isolated settlements below 25 families can be exceptionally included." World Bank, "*National Solidarity Program. Operation Manual*", 20 March 2004.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Willing to control and impose values/ideologies of various regimes to the Afghan society instead of recognizing social realities, previous governments in Afghanistan had alienated the rural society and resulted in a succession of failed States. The new administration had so far characterized itself by a very limited interaction with the Afghan society outside of Kabul, while billions are being poured into the country aiming at promoting “successful development”. The Afghan society on its side continued to survive through the odds of the recent history by enlarging its social networks or “*qawm*” at international level.

Learning from past experiences, the new administration in Kabul may encourage ownership of the Afghan society over its own destiny by promoting the emergence of representative grass-root level organizations or “*shura*”³³. The National Solidarity Program (NSP) is promoting such an approach, however without appropriate mechanisms.

The “*manteqa*” level for grass-root organization seems appropriate as it reflects the underlying social structure of rural Afghanistan, while other considerations such as watershed units may also be important as sustainable management of natural resources is essential to livelihood and sound

economic development³⁴. Preliminary field works tends to show that “*manteqa*” boundaries are most often delimited by natural landmarks and therefore a good level of overlapping between “*manteqa*” and micro-watersheds is anticipated.

Grass-root organization based on existing social structures representing various population groups at sub-district level would in turn influence the district administrations to represent fairly the various communities or “*manteqa*”. On the other hand, government, international organizations and NGOs should channel their support through the “*shura-e manteqa*” or “communal councils” and promote appropriate mechanisms to insure actual representation of all villagers in each “*manteqa*”.

A national strategy is required. A proper designation of the “*manteqa*” for all districts of Afghanistan would insure that all population groups are represented in any assistance activity to communities. Fair representation is a key factor for proper targeting of emergency and/or mid/long term programs, but also for the government of Afghanistan to establish an administrative system based on social realities. The “*manteqa*” could represent sub-district units where grass-root organizations - “*shura-manteqa*” or “communal councils”- can be organized and strengthened. Proper representation of population groups within each “*manteqa*” could be reinforced through appropriate approaches to deliver programs and services in rural

³³ It should be noted that in their early years, the Taliban established a grass-root based decision making process that proved highly successful and key for their initial success on the ground. They later on turned into a military based organization. See Ahmad Rashid, “*Taliban. Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*”, Yale University Press, 2000.

³⁴ See Favre, Raphy and Golam, M. Kamal, “*Watershed Atlas of Afghanistan. Working Document for Planners*”, FAO, AIMS, SDC, AREU, January 2004.

Afghanistan. Similarly, proper representation would insure appropriate decision making mechanisms at the local level. Rehabilitation and long term programs implemented with appropriate mechanisms through the “*shura-e manteqa*” or communal councils can be instrumental in strengthening grass-root organizations.

A review and evaluation of community based programs implemented by NGOs in the past 15 years and in particular the modalities adopted in inter-acting with communities may be helpful in understanding best methodologies, approaches and practices. National Guidelines and Code of Conduct for program delivery at local level should be developed.

The recommendations of this paper are summarized as follow:

1. To conduct a national census of sub-district social structures at “*manteqa*” level reflecting social realities of rural Afghanistan. This work should ideally be preceded by an official endorsement and definition of the “*manteqa*” as an administrative unit through which the government interacts with the Afghan society.
2. Support social group organizations at “*manteqa*” level such as the “*shura-e manteqa*” and their satellite “*shura*” to achieve better representation of the resident population and develop capacity of social group representatives to deal with public affairs.
3. To develop Guidelines based for program delivery mechanisms at grass-root level for all actors in Afghanistan. This work should include a review and evaluation of community programs implemented by NGOs. The guidelines would include maps of “*manteqa*” and sociological background for each district.

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ANNEX I – THE DISTRICT BEFORE AND AFTER THE WAR *

1. The district before 1978

The first attempt to systematically define the districts in Afghanistan was the Provisional Gazetteer of Afghanistan was the result of a cooperation agreement signed in 1970 by USAID and the Afghan Ministry of Planning as part of the “National Demographic Survey Project”. The PGA, authorized by the Prime Minister was published in 1975 by the CSO. Until the late 1960s, the district or “*uluswal*” was defined by the Afghan government only in terms of district center or “*markaz*”.

With the PGA, for the first time in Afghanistan the following work was implemented:

1. All Minor Civil Divisions were numbered.
2. The boundaries between the MCDs were defined as noted in the introduction of the PGA “*Prior to the Afghan Demographic Studies project, no attempt had been made to delimit the boundaries of the MCD’s ... some maps of the Afghan Cartographic Institute showed crude provincial boundaries...*”.
3. The sources existing in various ministries were compiled and conflated, especially those in the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation (MoAI).
4. Lists of villages with their population were prepared for each district according to the

information held by various ministries.

5. Villages were numbered and their geographical position noted in relation with the district center.

The Provisional Gazetteer of Afghanistan (PGA) suggests the following definition of the district:

“The district is the basic Minor Civil Division in Afghanistan. Each district includes an administrative center and surrounding villages. The administrator (“uluswal”) for each district is responsible to his supervising provincial governor (“wali”).”

After having been simply an administrative post guarded by a police station, the district center gradually grew in importance during the 1960s and 1970s with the more or less systematic and opening of schools and Basic Health Unit. The district center is the point where the local community could come into contact with the manifestation of the state and also have access to the modern world (post office, telephone, etc.). Lastly it was of course the point the State asserted its control on local society. However, the district administrators or “*uluswal*” rarely went outside the district center and preferred to manage their relation with the local community through the channel of

“*malek*” and “*arbab*”³⁵. The system of civil registrations, taxations and conscription into the army was managed by the district administrator together with the local notables. The PGA notes:

“Among the headmen’s (“malek”, “arbab”) responsibilities is the certification of the villager’s residence status and eligibility for registration in the Civil Registration System”.

After having defined the form (the district), it was necessary to define the content (villages): “*Below the MCD level are villages (“qarias”).* Here the PGA serious dysfunction. Many villagers are left out, names are vague and inaccurate, population estimates are seldom credible and the whole list lack rigor and consistency. Bruce Wannell notes that “the concept of village and even household was often vague and the available references, e.g. 1:100’000 maps and the 1975 Provisional Gazetteer were often in contradiction with observable reality e.g. man-made features on the maps were often very out of date as the surveys date mostly from the 1950s and the in the Gazetteer I found now a single farmhouse, now a valley listed as a village! ... Qaysar was referred to as one village (in the PGA), but had three distinct agglomerations separated by twenty minutes walk each!”.

The apparent contradiction between the excellent work done by the PGA at the district level and the poor quality of the same work done at the village level must be seen in the context of the relation between the district administration and the “*malek*”. For the “*malek*” it is not the principle of territoriality that count as for him the village hardly exist, but rather the principle of segmentarity; the “*malek*” and his social network or “*qawm*”.

When they accepted the concept of the district as being essentially a district center surrounded by a uniform mass of villages, more or less represented by the “*malek*”, the authors of the PGA then blinded themselves to a base and salient fact: local communities existed before the district center and had their own logical coherence independent of the district center. This expresses a certain level of territorial identity, the most important element of which seems to be the “*manteqa*”.

* This section is extracted and adapted by the author from Frédéric Roussel, “*Contraintes et perspectives dans le contexte actuel pour l’élaboration d’une stratégie de réhabilitation immédiate des zones rurales afghans*”, UNORSA, Peshawar, Juin 1993.

³⁵ Pierre and Micheline Centlivres published an excellent study on the relations between the district administration and local notables in the articles “*La politique au village*”, in : « Et si l’on parlait de l’Afghanistan », Inst. Ethnologie, Neuchâtel, Maison des sciences, Paris, 1988.

2. The district since 1978

The district "*uluswal*" was used to impose the "*saur*" communist revolution's rural reforms and repression of local notables which provoked large scale upraising of rural communities. In most cases, the district center was taken by assault and the administrative staff had to flee³⁶.

The district center which was the distinctive feature of the district before 1978 was either destroyed during the war or transformed into military post and in either case rendered inoperative.

The war has brought radical changes in rural Afghanistan: The district centers and local notables were replaced by commanders emerging with the new context of war and international political support (mostly through the 7 political parties based in Pakistan). After April 1992, all district centers in Afghanistan were in control of such military commanders. The segmentary system of the "*malek*" and their "*qawm*" has given way to the territorial, though fragmented, system of the commanders.

Today, rural Afghanistan and the district administration is controlled by military commanders. "*uluswal*" are appointed in various districts, but the approval of the local commanders is required and the district administrators have a more symbolic role than real authority. It is however the "*uluswal*" that deals with humanitarian agencies working in a given district.

³⁶ See Olivier Roy, "*L'Afghanistan: Islam et modernité politique*", Coll. Esprit/Seuil, 1985.

ANNEX II – THE NOTION OF VILLAGE IN AFGHANISTAN *

The notion of “village” itself is unclear in Afghanistan and can lead to a variety of interpretations. The PGA recognized the complexity and challenge posed by the notion of village:

“The village name and settlement pattern associations are often so complicated that no attempts have been made to systematize and delimit the boundaries of the rural unit”.

Further the PGA noted that the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation (MAI) defined the village as:

“The smallest administrative unit with human habitations in one or more “qala” (fortified house) as well as isolated houses served by one or more headmen. It was found that often several villages were under the jurisdiction of one headman, and conversely that some individual villages had more than one headman. The association of scattered dwellings and villages was a difficult problem, because on occasion even the inhabitants could not make the identification”.

The definition given by the MAI, which equated villages with their headman (“malek”) could not be adopted by the PGA authors without some modifications. The definition suggested by the PGA, who did not apparently have many illusions about its accuracy, was an attempt to add more territorial principles (like cemeteries and mosques) to the segmentary principle of the notable and his “qawm”:

“The most useful definition of the village is those clustered and dispersed dwelling units under the jurisdiction of one headman and using one of more

common cemeteries and mosques. However, in some cases, sections of the same village will have their own names. The single headman and mosque or cemetery association often does not apply in practice”.

The lack of clear definition of the village affected the village census in Afghanistan in two different ways, as recognized by the authors of the PGA:

“the first was “lumping” or including several small villages under one large village or regional name. The second was “splitting” when one sources showed consistent villages, one of which may or may not have the same name as a larger unit shown on another source”.

However, the undertaking was difficult, The PGA provide an example of a region (implicitly a “manteqa”) includes six settlements of clustered dwelling places (“qaria”) in addition to numerous dispersed dwellings:

“This situation was often recorded differently in the various source used by the Demographic Survey. One list might include only the regional name. A second list might show the six names as individual villages, with one of those having a regional name. On another list, two settlements, such as 4 and 5, might be grouped together under one village name. In yet another case, settlements 1, 2 and 3 might be included under the regional name and the remaining settlements listed as separate villages or ignored completely. The problem is complicated when the basis of the population estimates on the lists is not known. Also, in some cases, especially among smaller settlements, the village is

often named after the headman. With the death of the headman, the village name is changed to that of the new headman. The same settlement may have several local names, and on one map the same village name appeared 42 times”.

The author of the PGA clearly understood the unsatisfactory nature of the definition suggested to them by the MoAI (i.e assimilating village with their “*malek*”) and did not seem convinced by the additional variables they themselves suggested (i.e. mosques or cemeteries). They however implicitly recognized the regional names and the unstable nature of village (“*qaria*”) names. As the responsible of the PGA were unable to make a choice themselves, they left the initiative of choosing either village (“*qaria*”) or regional (“*manteqa*”) names to the field teams! The failure to resolve this contradiction led to incomplete and inconsistent lists of village names by district.

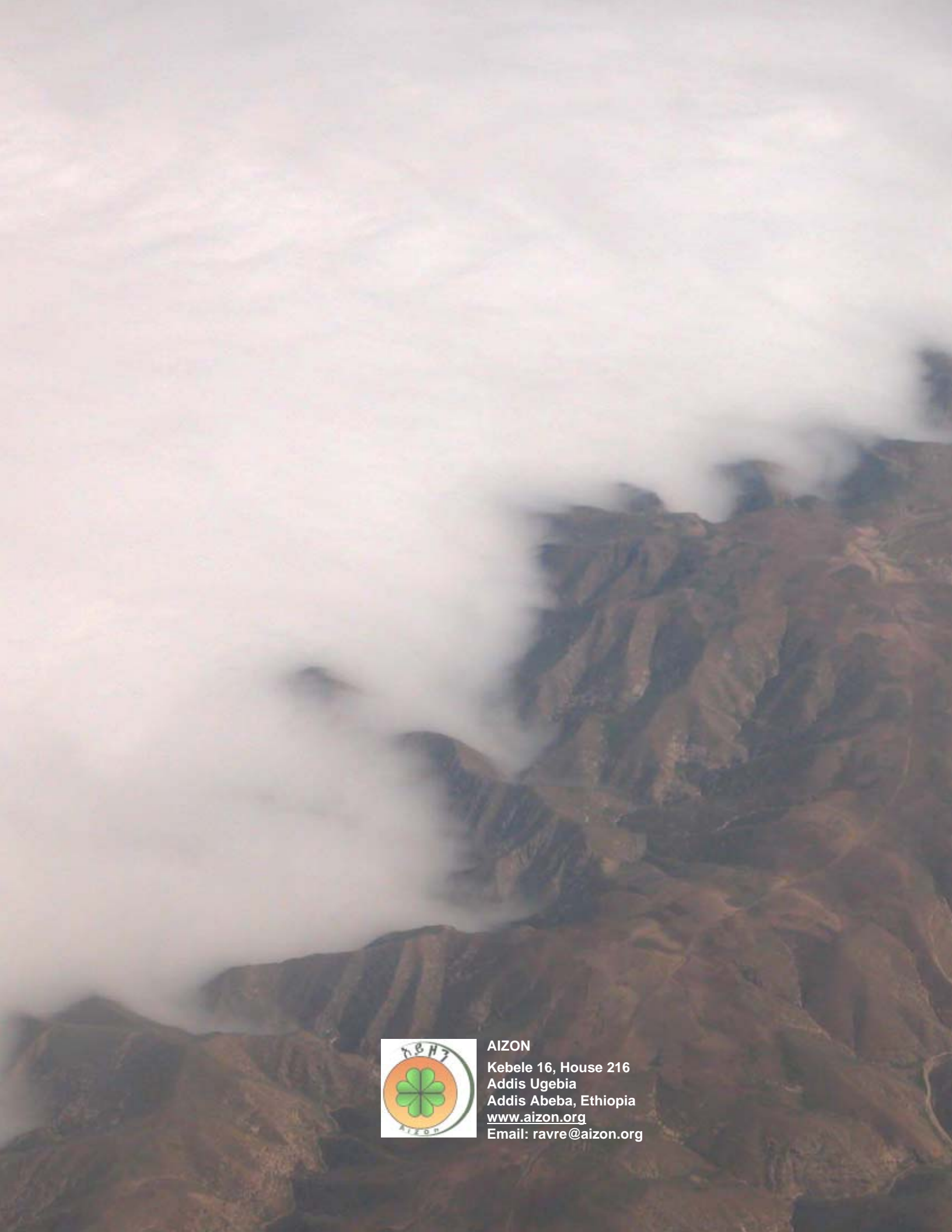
Frederic Roussel notes that the only mention made of the geographical position of the village in the PGA is its direction to the North, East, etc.. in relation to the district center. This tends to favor a vision of scattered villages with no common links between them other than their relation to the district center; whereas in fact a village is defined not in relation to the district center but in relation with neighboring villages which is reflected in the concept of “*manteqa*”.

Un-clarity over the notion of village in Afghanistan continues today to haunt both the Afghan administration and the international community working in Afghanistan. The discrepancies between the village lists from AIMS, WHO, FAO livestock survey, Ministry of Agriculture, WFP/VAM survey and the various maps available illustrates abundantly the problem.

In his recent work, Alessandro Monsutti³⁷ suggests that the notion of village should refer to the settlement/hamlet - “*qaria*”, “*âghel*”, “*deh*”, “*kalay*”, “*banda*” or “*qishlaq*”. Other notions such as mosque, cemetery or “*manteqa*” should not be assimilated to the notion of village.

* This section is extracted and adapted by the author from Frédéric Roussel, “*Contraintes et perspectives dans le contexte actuel pour l’élaboration d’une stratégie de réhabilitation immédiate des zones rurales afghans*”, UNORSA, Peshawar, Juin 1993.

³⁷ From Alessandro Monsutti, author of “*Guerres et migrations: réseaux sociaux et stratégies économiques des Hazaras d’Afghanistan*”, Neuchâtel: Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines (thèse de doctorat), Switzerland, 2003, 492 p.



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