



**Market development, Location of Bazaars and Road  
Network Conditions in Afghanistan**

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**Picture Front Page**

**View of Yakaolang bazaar after its reconstruction in 2003 with support from CHF. Yakaolang bazaars and others in the Central Highlands burned down by the Taleban. 4 June 2003**

**Picture Back Cover Page**

**View of Khamshor bazaar in Ghor province, Lal district, 2 June 2003**

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# 1. Introduction

Afghanistan is a landlocked country of 652'000 square km. Afghanistan's neighbours are the landlocked CIS countries (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan<sup>1</sup>) to the north, Pakistan to the east and south, the Islamic Republic of Iran to the west and China to the north-east. It is thus strategically located at the cross-road of three main regions; the Indian sub-continent to the east, central Asia to the north and the north-east and Iran in the west. Improvement of road and market links between Afghanistan and its neighbouring regions is therefore essential for its economic recovery and growth.

However, the market infrastructures and the road network condition which are essential to economic growth Afghanistan are not well documented. Understanding the road network, market development and bazaar distribution in Afghanistan is essential not only for a better appreciation of economic and trade constraints and opportunities but also in order to design appropriate programs targeting rural populations and for planning field activities. In order to fill existing gaps, road and market data have been collected and analysed between May and October 2003<sup>2</sup>. A database containing all data collected in the field has been compiled.

The report builds on formal data collection on market locations and road network conditions as well as qualitative field observations made by the author. It also explores the mechanisms of market creations and road network development that took place during the past 25 years of conflicts as well as the role of the *hawâla* system in financing market activities in the country. It also provides pre-war benchmarks on the situation of markets and road situation in 1977 which are used to compare with today's situation.

The report presents a short description of the methodology applied for the bazaar and road survey (chapter 2). Chapter 3 presents the results of the bazaar survey as well as a map showing the location of the bazaars identified in Afghanistan. It also discusses the mechanisms involved in the creation of new bazaars as well as the role of the *hawâla* system in financing market activities through a specific case study. Chapter 4 presents the results of the road network survey with specific observations on the "ring road" as well as secondary and highland roads. Chapter 5 discusses the massive creation of gravel/dirt roads during the past 25 years which is servicing the needs for an expanded bazaar network throughout the country. Chapter 6 provide a brief note on the road security from traders' perspectives.

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<sup>1</sup> These countries have the particularities to be "twice landlocked" as they are the only few countries in the world separated from the sea by two other nations.

<sup>2</sup> See contacts on the back cover page.

## 2. Methodology

Conducting a road network and bazaar census at national level is costly and has therefore not been undertaken systematically. Yet, data on road network and markets provide useful information on the economic integration of the Afghan society. In order to generate such data with a minimum of resources, Hakimullah, an MRRD<sup>3</sup> national civil servant and the author undertook a formal data collection on market locations and the road network linking these markets to district and provincial centres. To limit costs, information gathering was generally limited to existing knowledge available at each provincial centre. The main informants were the provincial authorities, mainly the Governor's Office, MRRD and MAAH<sup>4</sup> and drivers as well as passengers or caravanserai owners at each "garage" from where public vehicles depart to various districts. Hakimullah spent two to three days (excluding travel time) in each province to interview local informants.

At the centre of each province, the information on markets and roads were collected in the following sequences:

1. Listing of districts at each provincial governor or MRRD office.
2. First collection of data on market locations and road distances from official staffs working in MRRD and MAAH offices. In general, each office had staff from various districts of the province that could be interviewed.

3. Verification and completion of data in each "garage"<sup>5</sup> of provincial capitals where vehicles depart to various districts. Drivers, passengers and caravanserai owners were interviewed. Through such interviews, data on the road conditions, distances in kilometres and hours from the provincial or district centres to each market and the security situation on the road were collected.

Additionally, throughout 2003, the author travelled across various parts of Afghanistan. While on travel, annotations on the road conditions were made and thus formal data collection could be combined with direct field observations.

The formal data were collected by Hakimullah between May and October 2003. The data were entered and processed in Kabul in November 2003 and the analysis was made in 2004. The bazaars recorded by Hakimullah were located on the map using the 1:100,000 Afghanistan map and different databases such as AIMS villages list and the WFP/FAO agriculture and vulnerability surveyed villages' lists. Field knowledge of MAAH and MRRD government staffs in Kabul was also used for specific locations. Out of a total of 1,286 bazaars recorded, 960 or 75% could be mapped. A quarter of the bazaars could not be mapped either because new bazaars with new names were created in certain locations without previous settlements or because the

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<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry

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<sup>5</sup> Term used in Afghanistan.

names of the settlements where bazaars are located have changed.

The bazaars have been defined as any place where a minimum of five permanent shops are operating every day. Temporary bazaars were not recorded. Temporary bazaars include the followings:

- bazaars such as livestock markets, opening only once or twice a week during bazaar days and without permanent structures that operate every day (see picture 2).
- bazaars where goods are exchanged on a seasonal basis such as open air bazaars in summer pasturelands.

Also, it should be noted that only one bazaar per settlement was recorded although larger towns could contain several bazaars with sometimes several thousands of retailers.

The methodology applied does not aim at producing an exhaustive and precise census of bazaars and roads, but the data are sufficiently precise to give a fair idea of the distribution of bazaars across the country and the status of the road network.

The database on bazaars and roads is composed of two spreadsheets containing the following information:

- Road Network between province and districts:
  - Type of road (tarmac, gravel, dirt); distance from province to district in kilometres; the distance in hours for a commercial truck or a 4 wheel drive vehicle and the security situation for traders (in 2003).
- Bazaar location and road network between districts and each bazaars:
  - Distance from the district centre in kilometres; the distance in hours for a commercial truck or a 4 wheel drive vehicle and by foot from where the road ends, accessibility just after rainfall and in winter, the day of the week when the bazaar is held and a rough estimation of the number of shops.

**Picture 2**  
**Weekly market in Bala Murghab (Badghis province) where animals, agriculture products and household items are sold. The market takes place in an open field and do not have any permanent structure. 22 May 2003**



**Picture 3**  
**View of the wheat section of the permanent market in Khawaja Ghar (Takhar), 8 September 2003**





## 3. Bazaar Survey

### 3.1 Number of Bazaars and their Distribution

The map 1 shows the distribution of bazaars in Afghanistan and demonstrates that there is no region in the country which is not linked to a market. Casual field observations throughout the country confirm the penetration of bazaars in rural Afghanistan. These bazaars are often of a modest size but well furnished with a variety of goods imported from neighboring countries. Nearly all the bazaars in Afghanistan have a direct road link; out of 1,278 bazaars recorded, only 24 bazaars had no direct road access. For ten of them, the bazaars were more than 4 hours walk from the nearest road. These bazaars without direct road access are mainly located in the remote valleys of Uruzgan, Laghman/Kunar, Kapisa and in the upper valleys of Northern Afghanistan between Sari Pul and Takhar.

The map 1 also shows that a higher market density is observed in Eastern Afghanistan covering broadly the areas of Parwan, Kabul, Ghazni, Paktya, Jalalabad and Kunar. This pattern indicates the privileged economic links that Afghanistan has with Pakistan. It should be noted that in some regions particularly Kandahar province, the lower Helmand valley and the Turkestan plain, it was reported that each village has a number of permanently operating shops, which limits the role of regional bazaars at district or sub-district levels.

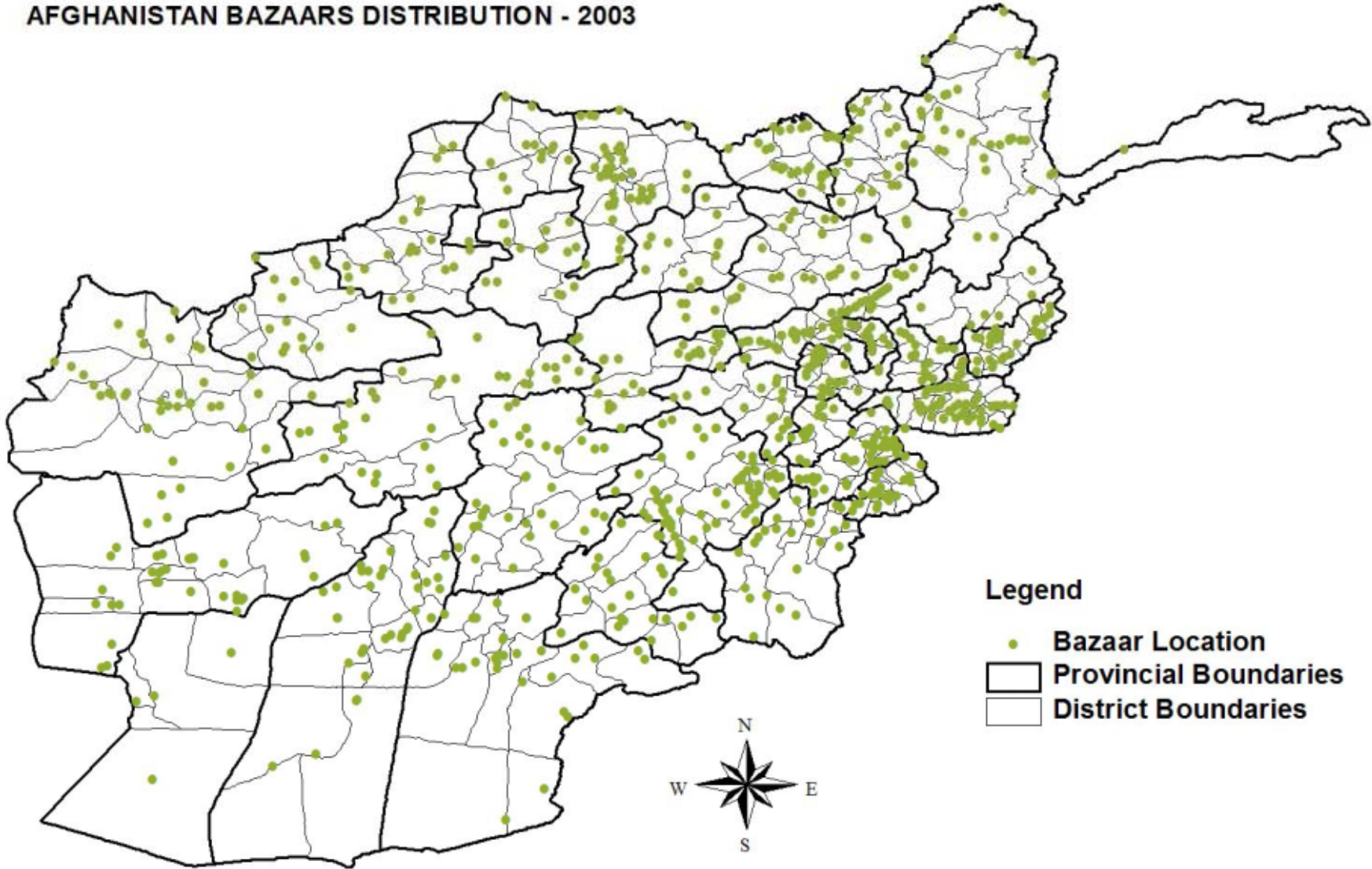
Therefore, for practical reasons, during interviews, only the bazaars covering a number of villages could be recorded in these regions. This reduces artificially the bazaar density on the map.

The third observation is that bazaar distribution is fairly homogenous in other parts of the country with, of course, some “holes” without markets in low populated deserts or high elevation areas. This tends to indicate that the main rationale for bazaar distribution is the distance the local population has to travel to reach the nearest market place. In general, if the time for a round trip to the nearest market takes more than a day then this was/is a sufficient pull factor for the creation of a new marketing place for a given social-group.

It should be highlighted here that 25% of the recorded bazaars could not be mapped and that the methodology certainly could not guarantee the identification of all bazaars. It is estimated that 50% of the bazaars were not recorded due to methodological limitations. Considering the unrecorded bazaars and regions where nearly each village has its own bazaar, the best estimates of the number of settlement with marketing facilities in Afghanistan is around 3,000.

Map 1

**AFGHANISTAN BAZAARS DISTRIBUTION - 2003**



### 3.2 Mechanisms for the Creation of New Bazaars

Bazaars link villages/rural areas to the cities. In normal economies, the penetration and development of bazaars in rural areas is made possible by farmers marketing their agriculture surplus in exchange for other necessities such as clothing, tea, sugar or construction material. In most contexts, market development presupposes that farmers have a surplus to market. But market development in Afghanistan has followed a different pattern.

Agriculture data<sup>6</sup> show that Afghanistan has been food deficit since production data exists. The latest FAO 2002-03 winter agriculture survey showed that 70% of the farmers had no surplus to market in 2002 which was considered as a normal year<sup>7</sup>. Most farmers had to complement their production with imported wheat procured on the market to fulfill their family food requirements. Even in record years such as 2003, the country still requires to import food from outside as cities can absorb only part of the afghan grains due to the embryonic milling industry in Afghanistan<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> See statistics at [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)

<sup>7</sup> Maletta, Hector and Favre, Raphy, "Agriculture and Food Production in Post-war Afghanistan. A Report of the Winter Agriculture Survey 2002-2003", FAO, Kabul, August 2003. [www.fao.org/world/afghanistan/](http://www.fao.org/world/afghanistan/)

<sup>8</sup> In cities, the demand is for white bread which is made with white milled wheat flours imported from neighboring countries.

In 2003, Afghanistan did not have any private roller flour mills and the five governmental silo/mill enterprises (Kabul, Mazar, Pul-e Khumri, Kandahar and Herat) were not operational. In 2004, the private sector has invested in roller flour mills in all the major cities:

- Kabul: two new mills (Kabul New flour mill and Watan flour mill) with a capacity of about 160 MT/day each

With a tradition of trade since the Silk Road era and the development of a war economy since the early 80s, market development in Afghanistan was boosted by the following factors<sup>9</sup>:

- Monsutti (2003)<sup>10</sup> showed the influence of remittances<sup>11</sup> sent by the Afghan Diaspora through the "hawâla" system and particularly the close relation between remittances and trade (see case study below). Income from remittances has created a strong market demand for consumption goods in all parts of the country.

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- Herat: one private flour mill operational and one is under construction;
  - Mazar-e Sharif: one operational mill, two mills recently build but were closed down as they apparently used obsolete Chinese technology. A new flour mill is under construction with a 400 mt/day capacity. It will be the largest in the country in 2005.
  - Kandahar: one flour mill is under-construction

<sup>9</sup> For a historical discussion on market development in Northern Afghanistan before the war, see Pierre Centlivres, "Structures et évolution des bazars du Nord afghan"; in Centlivres, Pierre and Centlivres-Demont, Micheline; "Et si on parlait d'Afghanistan?", Neuchâtel, Institut d'ethnologie & Maison des sciences de l'homme, Neuchâtel & Paris, 1988.

<sup>10</sup> Monsutti, Alessandro "Guerres et migrations: réseaux sociaux et stratégies économiques des Hazaras d'Afghanistan", Maison des sciences de l'homme & Institut d'ethnologie, Neuchâtel & Paris, 2004, 364 p.

<sup>11</sup> Monsutti showed that war, not only due the situation of insecurity, but also by the absence of economic perspectives has pushed Afghans out of their country. After 25 years of war, migratory movements have become well planned and organized to become a major constitutive element of the Afghan society. The most appealing element of these migratory movements is the enormous flux of capital (remittances) toward Afghanistan.

- High profits from opium poppy production in recent years created massive economic opportunities for the rural population that were translated into the creation of new bazaars. Creation of new bazaars related to poppy income has been observed during field visits in 2003 in various provinces such as Badakhshan and Farah. In 2004, UNODC estimates that the value of opiate exports to neighboring countries is equivalent to around 60% of the 2003 licit GDP of Afghanistan<sup>12</sup>.
- Creation of new bazaars in the past years was often the result of rivalries between social groups and/or military factions. In 2003, rivalries between Ismael Khan and Amanullah Khan resulted in the creation of a new bazaar in Shindand district (Herat province) as Amanullah Khan tried to achieve higher independence in trade in the area under his control. Gilles Dorronsoro (1996)<sup>13</sup> made similar observations and noted that new bazaars were created during the Afghan war as a consequence of rivalries between commanders.

While market demands have been boosted by the above factors, the absence of government control over the territory in the past two decades has resulted in the establishment of a wild “free market economy”. The only regulation of these markets is the influence of military commanders and factions who are forcing traders’ allegiances (bribes, security taxes, other extortions) to them. On the other hand, given the prevailing insecurity in the country, traders partnered solely along trustworthy kinship ties (e.g. a brother or a cousin in Pakistan, Dubai or another city in Afghanistan) and/or close neighborhood. Transnational networks along social lines, which is a result of the Afghan wars, facilitate trading between Afghanistan and other countries. As a result, markets in Afghanistan are well connected to the international markets.

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<sup>12</sup> UNODC, “*Afghanistan Opium Survey 2004*”, Counter Narcotic Directorates, November 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Gilles Dorronsoro, “*Afghanistan: des réseaux de solidarité aux espaces régionaux*”, in : Rufin, J.-Ch. and Jean, François, “*Economie des guerres civiles*”, p. 147-188.

### 3.3 Case Study: *Hâwala* System or Transfer of Money among Hazaras

The Hazaras<sup>14</sup> in the Central Highlands (Bamyan, parts of Ghor, Uruzgan and Ghazni districts) have woven very efficient migratory networks based on the dispersion of the members of the same kin group between Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Each place has its own advantages and drawbacks. In Iran (especially in the big cities), it is easy to find a job, but almost impossible to settle on a long-term basis; in Quetta, on the other hand, the Hazaras can move freely, but the professional activities available to them are scarce; in Hazarajat, they can work their land but the long-term social and economic prospects are bleak.

When a Hazara working in Iran (*kârgar*) wants to send his savings back to his family in Afghanistan, he cannot use the official banking system since he is unlikely to have any identity papers and, in any case, there are no longer any banks in Afghanistan. He will therefore entrust his money to a businessman specializing in informal remittances and known locally as a *hawâladâr*<sup>15</sup>, from

*hawâla*<sup>16</sup>, "transfer (of money)", "credit letter" or "cheque". Both *kârgar* and *hawâladâr* must belong to the same lineage or come from the same valley. If the relationship is not as close, a middleman is needed.

The *hawâladâr* passes on to his partners a letter stating the details of the transaction (letter b in the chart) and gives the *kârgar* a second letter (letter a), which the latter sends to his family in Afghanistan via a friend going back home. The commission charged is very low (less than 3 %), (as the *hawâladâr*'s profit is earned from the trade itself), and depends on how distant is the deadline for repayment and how close the relationship is between the *kârgar* and the *hawâladâr*. As security on the road networks has significantly improved in the past 2 years, the commission of the *hawâladâr* is now close to 1%. The latter sends the money through the official banking system to Pakistan, where one of his partners (always a close relative) retrieves the money, may use it to make a profit through currency exchange and finally buys some goods (*wheat*, rice,

<sup>14</sup> This section is extracted from Monsutti, Alessandro, "The Hazara of Afghanistan : Coping through Emigration and remittances". Published in: Money and Survival, ICRC's Forum (Geneva) 2, 2000, p. 72-73 and Monsutti, Alessandro, "Cooperation Remittances, and Kinship among the Hazaras", The International Society for Iranian Studies, No2, June 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Half banker half trader, the *hawâladâr* has become specialized in the transfer of money due to the intense circulation of funds and goods between Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries. The *hawâla* system is ancient to this part of the world, but gain in importance and volume of trade during the war. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the use of letter of credit was attested: A savant who journeys to Spain [from Egypt] takes

with him a letter of credit (*suftajah*), and 5,000 dirhams in cash. Nâsir-i Khusrau received from an acquaintance in Asuan a blank letter of credit addressed to his agent (*wakil*) in 'Aidhâb, of the following content: "Give Nâsir all that he may demand, obtain a receipt from him and debit the sum to me" (Labib 1969: 89). In: Monsutti, Alessandro, *Guerres et migrations: réseaux sociaux et stratégies économiques des Hazaras d'Afghanistan*, Institut d'ethnologie & Maison sc. Homme, Neuchâtel & Paris, 2004, 364 p.

<sup>16</sup> Due to the absence of functioning banking system in most of Afghanistan, the *hawâla* system is used to transfer money and is generalized to all population groups in Afghanistan.

cooking oil, sugar, tea, but also shoes, cloth, cooking pots, etc.). He dispatches them by lorry to the family village in Hazarajat, where a third partner runs a shop. The goods are sold and the proceeds are used to pay the *kârgar's* family the money sent by their relative.

The process seems complicated, but to trade minded Afghans, it appears simple. Practically, the situation could be as follow<sup>17</sup>:

(A) Abdullah Jan works in Isfahan (Iran) and wants to send cash to his family in Hazarajat (Qarabagh district).

(B) Ramazan Ali (the person interviewed) travels between Iran and Quetta (Pakistan).

(C) Abdul Jaffar keeps a shop in Qarabagh district (Ghazni province).

(D) Le cousin (MBS) of Ramazan Ali, Mohammad Taqi, is *hawâladâr* in Qarabagh.

(E) Qodratullah, brother of Abdullah Jan, lives in Qarabagh and both families share the same house.

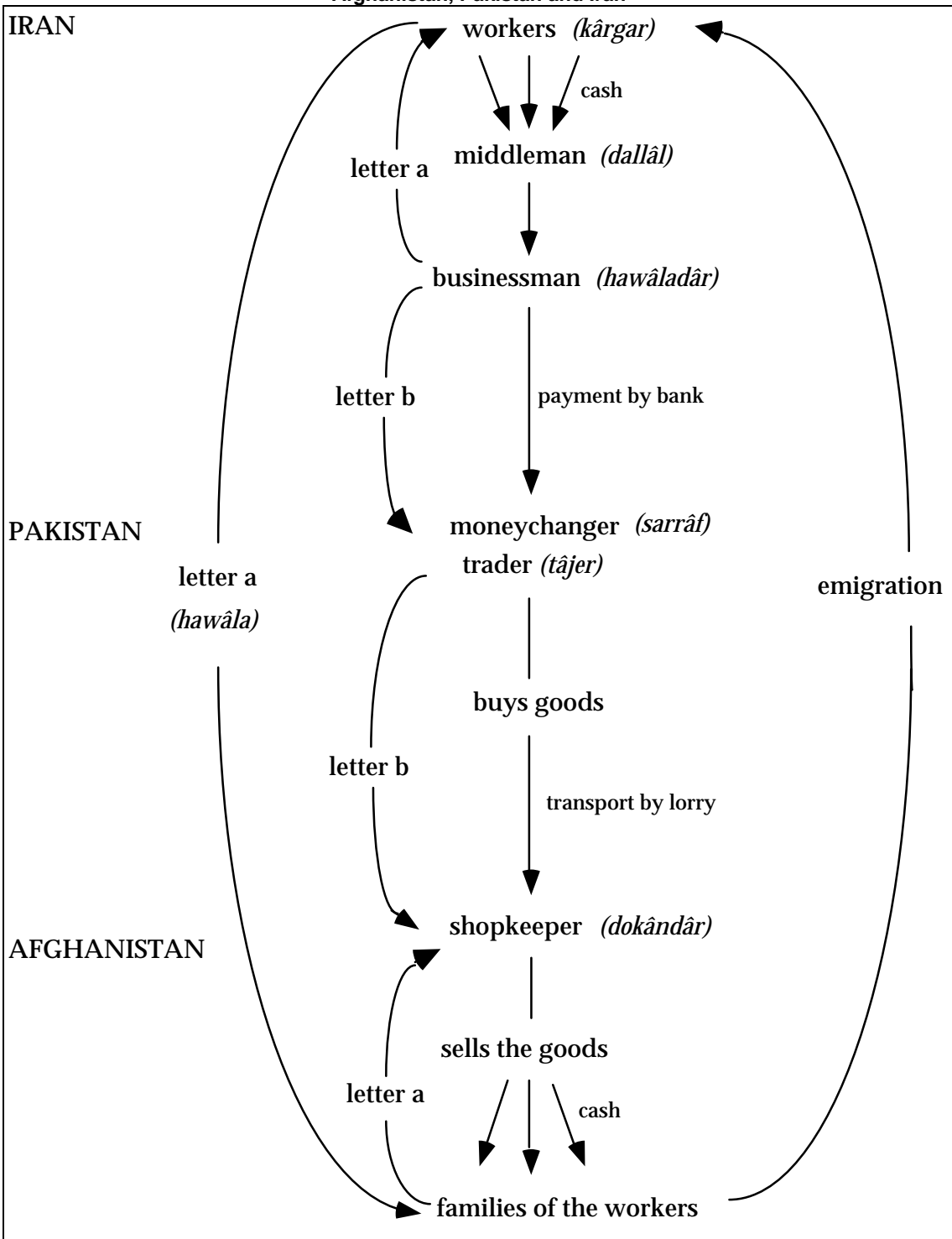
(A) gives his savings to (B) and receives in exchange a *hawâla* (half of a note with a stamp divided in two parts). (B) gives the money to merchants in Iran having import-export licenses who then transfer the amount for him to a bank account in Pakistan. (B) keeps the second half of the *hawâla* and travels to Quetta from where he sends the *hawâla* to (D), who collects the money and lends it to (C). (B) knows (C) well because he keeps a shop in the home village of (B). With the borrowed money, (C) procures various goods (rice, wheat, cloth, etc...) and rents a truck to transport them to Afghanistan. Once in Qarabagh, (C) collects the goods, sells them and reimburses to (D) the amount given by (B). In turn, (D) pays (E). In the meantime, (E) has received the second

half of the *hawâla* from (A), staying in Iran, who had given it to a trusted person returning to Qarabagh.

In the absence of any external guarantee from the State, trust is essential to ensure that the transaction is respected. Such trust can only develop if the interactions occur regularly and over a long period of time. Members of each social and ethnic group deal with members of other groups only when strictly necessary, such as to cross borders or to travel in hostile areas. Despite the trauma of war and exile, Hazaras have thus managed to take advantage of their geographic dispersion and the resulting economic diversification by developing new trans-national cooperation structures.

<sup>17</sup> These are the protagonists Monsutti first interviewed during his research, *Ibid.*, p. 235, 2004.

Figure 1  
*Hawâla* systems and interrelations among the Hazara community between Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran<sup>18</sup>



<sup>18</sup> A. Monsutti; *Ibid.*, 2000, p. 72-73.

This case study also shows how remittances are financing trade in Afghanistan up to the remotest places in the country (in our case a village in Qarabagh district). As it continues to be operational despite insecurity throughout the Afghan war, remittances sent through the *hawâla* in all parts of Afghanistan boosted the creation of bazaars. Due to insecurity and the absence of State, each social group had developed its communal market place or bazaar through the good services of their own *hawâladâr*. It may appear unconventional to state the following, but it took 25 years of war to achieve this result!

Although the *hawâla* is omnipresent in all parts of Afghanistan, the process of money transfer may not be visible to external observers. The amount of remittances through the *hawâla* is difficult to establish through formal surveys such as the NRVA vulnerability survey<sup>19</sup>. Yet, through detail anthropological work, Monsutti estimated that Hazara workers in Iran send \$200 million per year to their families in Hazarajat<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment. The NRVA was a joint undertaking between MRRD, WFP, FAO, the World Bank and UNICEF. The main objective of the NRVA was to collect information to better understand the livelihoods of rural people in Afghanistan. See “*Report on Findings from the 2003 National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) in Rural Afghanistan*”, VAM and VAU, December 2004. [www.mrrd.gov.af/vau/#NRVA](http://www.mrrd.gov.af/vau/#NRVA)

<sup>20</sup> Monsutti, Alessandro, *Ibid.*, 2004, p. 250



## 4. Road Network Survey

The Afghan road network is of strategic importance for the economy of Afghanistan and its neighbors, particularly Pakistan. The context of the opening of the road to traders in the southeastern corner of Afghanistan during the first Taleban appearance in Chaman in autumn 1994 is an illustration of this fact<sup>21</sup>.

The tables 1 and 2 below present data on the time necessary to travel between major towns and provincial centres along the main Afghan Ring road and the Central Highlands transversal road. The table 1 provides information on travelling distances to most provincial centres in Afghanistan, while the database contains more detailed information on estimated distances and time necessary to get to district centres from each provincial centre. Distances and travelling time can be thus calculated from different points in Afghanistan.

The road reconstruction map prepared by AIMS<sup>22</sup> (map 2) illustrates the geographical coverage of various donors involved in road rehabilitation. Most of the roads in Afghanistan run along narrow valleys with thin strips of vegetation on their flanks. Rehabilitation and Construction of new Highways in Afghanistan such as the missing North-Western section of the ring-road (Herat-Mazar-e Sharif) and the transversal central road through the central Highlands, should consider environmental and pollution damages that such roads can create in the long run. Relocation from the valley floor to the hillsides of sections of damaged roads or new highways is necessary (central Afghanistan road).

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<sup>21</sup> On the raise of the Taleban, see Rashid, Ahmad; *“Taleban. Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia”*, Yale University Press, 2000.

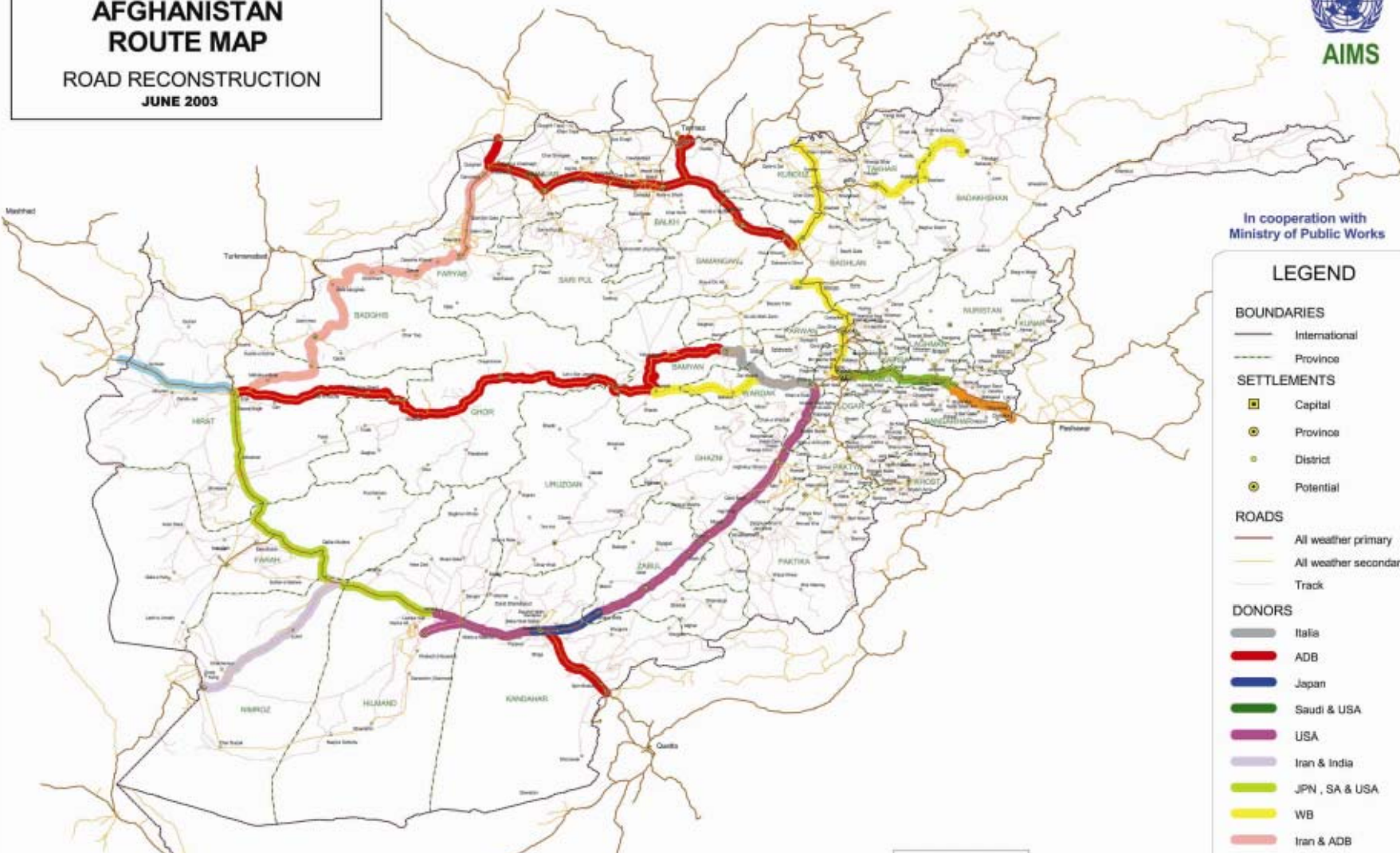
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<sup>22</sup> Afghanistan Information Management System. [www.aims.org.af](http://www.aims.org.af)

Map 2  
Road Reconstruction Map, AIMS, 2003



**AFGHANISTAN  
ROUTE MAP**  
ROAD RECONSTRUCTION  
JUNE 2003



In cooperation with  
Ministry of Public Works

**LEGEND**

- BOUNDARIES**
- International
  - Province
- SETTLEMENTS**
- Capital
  - Province
  - District
  - Potential
- ROADS**
- All weather primary
  - All weather secondary
  - Track
- DONORS**
- Italy
  - ADB
  - Japan
  - Saudi & USA
  - USA
  - Iran & India
  - JPN, SA & USA
  - WB
  - Iran & ADB
  - EU / SIDA
  - Iran
  - Pakistan



**NOTE:**  
The boundaries and names on the maps do not imply official endorsement or consideration by the United Nations.  
For further information contact AIMS  
e-mail: [AIMS@un.org](mailto:AIMS@un.org)

## 4.1 Afghan “Ring Road”

The “ring road” is serving the main markets of Afghanistan; Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar-e Sharif and Jalalabad. The “ring road” has considerably deteriorated in the past 25 years. The table 1 below compares the time necessary to travel from different locations on the main ring road between 1977, as noted by Nancy H. Dupree<sup>23</sup>, and 2003 as noted in recent travels<sup>24</sup>. The road between Kandahar and Kabul has particularly deteriorated as well as some sections of the road between Herat to Kandahar. This negatively affects prices of commodities on the Afghan markets and it is a major constraint for marketing horticulture products Afghanistan was once famous. Annex I presents qualitative observations on the condition of the “ring road”.

Some sections of the main Afghan ring road linking major Afghan market centers are impassable in the case of rainfall:

- Some sections of the road between Maimana and Qaisar.
- The way from Bucan to Bala Murghab via Se-kotal (very difficult passes) - (see pictures 7 and 8).
- The road from Bucan to Bala Murghab along the Gormach river is not passable at all.
- The road section between the end of Dara-e Boom and Moqur.

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<sup>23</sup> Nancy H. Dupree, “*An Historical Guide to Afghanistan*”, Afghan Air Authority, Kabul, 1977.

<sup>24</sup> Raphy Favre, “*Monitoring of the Winter Agriculture and Food Security Survey and Field Observations on Agriculture Situation in Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, Balkh, Jawzjan, Sar-e Pul, Faryab, Badghis, Herat, Farah, Helmand and Kandahar (Northern, Western and Southern Afghanistan) Field Mission Brief - 31 December 2002 to 18 January 2003*”, FAO, Kabul, 28 January 2003.

**Table 1**  
**Comparison of traveling time on the “ring road” between 1977 and 2003**

Location “ Ring Road”	Distance Km	Time 2003	Av. speed (Km/h)	Time 1977	Difference
<b>NORTH</b>					
<i>Kunduz - Mazar-e Sharif</i>	305	5 h 40	54	4 h 15	+ 1 h 25
Kunduz - Pul-e Khumri	105	3 h 15	32	2 h 00	+ 1 h 15
Kunduz - Old Baghlan	70	2 h 30	28	1 h 30	+ 1 h 00
Kunduz - New Baghlan	80	2 h 50	28	1 h 45	+ 1 h 05
Old Baghlan – Pul-e Khumri	35	0 h 45	47	0 h 30	+ 0 h 15
Pul-e Khumri - Mazar-e Sharif	200	2 h 30	80	2 h 30	+ 0 h 00
Pul-e Khumri – Samangan	80	1 h 00	80	1 h 00	+ 0 h 00
Samangan – Mazar-e Sharif	120	1 h 30	80	1 h 30	+ 0 h 00
<i>Mazar-e Sharif – Maimana*</i>	275	7 h 45	35	10 h 00	- 2 h 15
Mazar-e Sharif – Sheberghan	130	1 h 45	75	1 h 45	+ 0 h 00
Sheberghan - Sar-e Pul	50	1 h 10	42	-	-
Mazar-e Sharif – Aqcha	80	1 h 00	80	1 h 00	+ 0 h 00
Sheberghan – Maimana*	145	6 h 00	24	8 h 00	- 2 h 00
Sheberghan – Dawlatabad**	90	2 h 50	32	5 h 00	- 2 h 10
Dawlatabad – Maimana	65	3 h 00	22	3 h 00	+ 0 h 00
Shirin Tagab – Maimana	50	2 h 10	23	2 h 00	+ 0 h 10
<b>WEST</b>					
<i>Maimana – Herat</i>	475	16 h 30	29	15 h 30	+ 1 h 00
Maimana – Qala-e Naw	305	12 h 00	25	10 h 00	+ 2 h 00
Maimana – Qaisar	65	2 h 40	24	2 h 00	+ 0 h 40
Qaisar – Gormach	60	2 h 40	22		
Maimana – Bala Murghab	195	7 h 15	27	6 h 00	+ 1 h 15
Bala Murghab – Qala-e Naw	110	4 h 45	23	4 h 00	+ 0 h 45
Qala-e Naw – Herat	170	4 h 30	38	5 h 30	- 1 h 00
<b>SOUTH</b>					
<i>Herat – Kandahar***</i>	565	9 h 45	58	7 h 00	2 h 45
Herat – Shindand	120	1 h 45	68		
Shindand – Farah	175	4 h 30	39	2 h 30	+ 2 h 00
Herat – Farah	275	6 h 00	48	4 h 00	+ 2 h 00
Farah – Junction (Farah Rud)	65	1 h 30	43	1 h 30	+ 0 h 00
Farah – Girishk	300	5 h 15	57	4 h 30	+ 0 h 45
Girishk – Lashkar Gah	40	1 h 00	40	1 h 00	+ 0 h 00
Girishk – Kandahar	120	1 h 30	80	1 h 30	+ 0 h 00
Girishk – Kajaki dam	90	2 h 20	39	1 h 30	+ 0 h 50
<b>SOUTH WEST</b>					
<i>Kandahar – Kabul</i>	490	15 h 00	33	6 h 00	+ 9 h 00
Kandahar – Qalat	135	3 h 45	36	2 h 00	+ 1 h 00
Kandahar – Ghazni	350	9 h 45	36	4 h 30	+ 5 h 00
Qalat – Ghazni	215	6 h 00	36	3 h 00	+ 3 h 00
Ghazni – Kabul	140	5 h 00	28	1 h 30	+ 3 h 30
<b>CENTRAL</b>					
<i>Kabul – Mazar-e Sharif****</i>	430	7 h 30		7 h 00	+ 0 h 30
<i>Kabul – Jalalabad</i>	150	3 h 00		2 h 30	+ 0 h 30

\* Via Dasht-e-Laili.

\*\* Dasth-e-Laili ends at Dawlatabad.

\*\*\* Direct without branching in Farah or Shindand.

\*\*\*\* The time needed is very much depending on the situation at the Salang Pass. The tunnel is open on one direction every second day and in summer 2003, it was open only at night due to maintenance work. There are often traffic jams in the tunnel

**Picture 4**  
**View of the tarmac “ring-road” at Tang-e Tashkurgan between Kabul and Mazar-e Sharif.**  
**11 May 2003**



## 4.2 Secondary and Highlands Roads

### A. Comparison 1977 - 2003

The table 2 below compares the time necessary to travel from different locations in the main mountainous areas of the central highlands and the North-eastern Highland regions. The table 2 shows that travelling time on highland roads have reduced as compared to the

pre-war situation. However, the road condition in the highlands depends on weather conditions and the annual degradation that occurs in winter and spring. Annual maintenance is essential to keep the roads open.

**Table 2**  
Comparison of traveling time in some mountainous areas between 1977 and 2003

Location "Mountainous Areas"	Distance Km	Time 2003	Av. speed (Km/h)	Time 1977	Difference
<b>NORTH – EAST</b>					
<i>Faizabad – Kunduz</i>	245	6 h 15	39	11 h 00	- 4 h 45
Faizabad – Kishim	105	2 h 15	47	5 h 30	- 3 h 15
Faizabad – Taluqan	170	5 h 00	34	9 h 30	- 4 h 30
Kishim – Taluqan	70	2 h 45	25	4 h 00	- 1 h 15
Taluqan – Kunduz	75	1 h 15	60	1 h 30	- 0 h 15
<i>Upper Badakhshan</i>					
Faizabad – Baharak	40	1 h 15	32	2 h 00	- 0 h 45
Faizabad – Ishkashim	145	6 h 15	23	8 h 00	- 1 h 45
Faizabad – Khandud (Wakhan)	225	9 h 30	24	-	
Faizabad – Qala-e Panja (Wakhan)	260	10 h 45	24	-	
Faizabad – Jurm	65	2 h 00	33	3 h 00	- 1 h 00
Faizabad – Kuran wa Munjan (Razer)	150	8 h 00	19	-	
<i>Kabul – Anjuman pass (4480 masl)</i>	240	13 h 00	18	-	
<b>CENTRAL</b>					
Kabul – Bamyān (via Shibar)	235	7 h 00	34	6 h 30	- 0 h 30
Kabul – Bamyān (via Hajigak)	180	6 h 00	30	7 h 00	- 1 h 00
Bamyān – Panjao	170	5 h 30	31	6 h 00	- 0 h 30
Bamyān – Yakaolang	95	2 h 30	38	2 h 50	- 0 h 20
Panjao – Chaghcharan	230	8 h 00	29	8 h 00	+ 0 h 00
Yakaolang – Chaghcharan (via Kotal-e Sat Barg – Lal district)		9 h 30		-	
Lal – Chaghcharan	130	4 h 00	32	4 h 00	+ 0 h 00
Chaghcharan – Herat	425	16 h 00	26	16 h 00	+ 0 h 00
Chaghcharan – Kemenj	130	8 h 00	16	-	
Kemenj – Chesht-e Sharif	75	4 h 30	17	-	
Chaghcharan – Chesht-e Sharif	205	12 h 30	16	-	
Obey – Herat	110	3 h 00	37	3 h 00	+ 0 h 00
Chesht-e Sharif – Herat	175	4 h 45	37	5 h 00	- 0 h 15

**Picture 5**  
**View of a dirt road section between Yakaolang and Bamyán (central Highlands road).**  
**4 June 2003**



Before the war, many parts of Afghanistan were completely inaccessible. In 1970, G. Etienne<sup>25</sup> notes that camels still played an important role in the central highlands. The few roads that were available, barely practicable in summer, had incited the use of trucks by the rich Pashtun nomads (“*kuchi*”) in their trade with the Hazara residents. The Hazaras had unfavourable terms of exchange in the 70s; they had to buy at high prices from the “*kuchi*” and only got low prices for their products.

The situation has dramatically changed today. In remote parts of Afghanistan track roads have been extensively created and link district centres, villages and valleys to markets places. In Central

Afghanistan, there are hardly any inhabited valleys where a road has not been built. These track roads go to many highland villages and reduce significantly the walking distance for those still without direct access by road. Most isolated areas have been connected to the road network and markets in the past two decades.

Annex II presents qualitative observations on the road conditions in the Afghan Highlands (Central Highlands and Badakhshan).

<sup>25</sup> Etienne, G., “*L’Afghanistan ou les Aléas de la Coopération*”, PUF, Paris, 1972.

## B. A Road Network under Constant Deterioration

### Road in the Northern Loess Hills

The Northern loess hills of the provinces of Faryab, Sar-e Pul, Badghis and Badakhshan have however a very limited road network and long hours of walking are still required to reach villages. These hills are comprised of huge layers of loess or fine soil particles that are transported every year during the summer period by the northern wind (*Shamal*) from the Central Asian plains to the foot of the Afghan mountains. There, where the wind speed is slowed

by the relief, these particles are deposited. Experience gained by NGOs in building roads on these loess hills has shown that it is a complicated task. Due to the absence of rocks and stones in the thick layers of loess, the roads are regularly badly damaged during the heavy spring rains. When it rains land slides are common and the roads become so slippery that it becomes impassable for any vehicle.

### Winter Road Conditions in Central Highlands

In winter and spring the road conditions in the central highlands deteriorate, but most roads remain open provided some maintenance is made. Winter in the Afghan central highlands is characterized by very cold nights and rather warm days and by cold spells followed by warmer periods. These characteristics of winter climate, in an arid environment, have the following consequences on road conditions:

- Snowfalls are rarely very thick and the snow pack is melting and compacting during the warmer days that generally follow cold spells. Roads are rarely blocked for long period of time because of snow.
- The track roads in mountainous areas are often found in narrow valleys between the river and agriculture fields. At night, the rivers and streams freeze, while with the warmth of the day the water can flow again. This results in the creation of layers of ice piling up at certain locations during winter. Thus when

the road is too close to rivers, streams, irrigation canals or goes across small streams without bridges, the track road may be blocked for several months due to these ice formations.

Many areas, inaccessible during winter can become accessible for most of the year with some road upgrading such as elevating specific road sections that are too close to rivers or irrigation canals and building small bridges or culverts where the road crosses streams<sup>26</sup>. In

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<sup>26</sup> In Bamyan province, the road between Bamyan centre and Yakaolang was closed in winter 2001/02 due to ice blocking the road at Darwaz village of Shaheedan valley. A long, tortuous and dangerous improvised road could however be used for emergency links between Bamyan and Yakaolang. The road section was elevated by an average of 70 centimetres over 350 meters through a Food for Work program with WFP in collaboration with an Afghan NGO Implementing Partner. This resulted in the road remaining open throughout the winter 2002/03.



order to travel in remote areas during the winter season, traders/businessmen hire “all weather” Kamaz trucks. Smaller vehicles moving in those areas, form convoys and follow commercial trucks when roads are particularly difficult. However, in the North-Eastern regions

of Badakhshan and Nuristan, the roads are closed throughout the whole winter and spring due to the important snow cover in these parts of the country. Annual rain/snow fall in the North-eastern region are the highest in the country.

**Picture 6**  
**Land slides are common in spring in the central Highlands. Here in Yakaolang district of Bamyan province), 4 June 2003**



## 5. Massive Construction of New Gravel/Dirt Roads in the past 25 years

Data collected in this survey shows that secondary roads are linking every single district in Afghanistan with the exception of a very few in Badakhshan province in the Northeast. The data also demonstrates that the road network has extended much beyond district centres as the vast majority of markets surveyed are well served by gravel or dirt roads across the country. The database presents estimates of distance and time necessary to travel from province centres to district centres and from district centres to the various market locations. The expansion of the road network as compared to the pre-war level has tremendously increased the accessibility of rural Afghanistan. However, not all districts and markets are accessible all year round and some are cut off just after heavy rain or snowfall.

The significant development of the gravel/dirt road network is partly the result of WFP Food for Work programs implemented by different NGOs in the past few years. However, it should be noted that military commanders also played a significant role in developing a wide network of basic road infrastructures across the whole of Afghanistan. Many track roads were

built by the local population under the authority of local commanders, normally without any payment or compensation. Such arrangements, locally known as *begari*, for road construction or repairing were observed in June 2003 in Lal district of Ghor province (see picture 7). Commanders had an interest to secure their communications particularly with Pakistan from where most of the external support to the resistance was channeled through. The experience of Afghanistan is a case where the convergence of interests between the logistics or war, military operations and the economy (trade) resulted in a massive extension of the road network as well as bazaars.

The dramatic expansion of the secondary road networks in Afghanistan facilitated the development of trade (financed through the informal "*hawâla*" system) during the past two and half decades of war. Badakhshan appears have the least developed road network, mostly due to the difficult countryside and the high precipitations in the north-eastern mountains. Road networks in the northern Loess Hills are also significantly less developed.

**Picture 7**  
**Hazara people in Garm-ab maintaining/enlarging a road section without payment under the authoritarian directives of local commanders (*begari*). Lal district, Central Highland road**  
**3 June 2003**



## 6. Security for Trade

The data on the extension of the gravel or dirt road network at the provincial level include observations on the security for traders in May, June, July 2003. In most parts of the country, the security for traders was good enough for them to continue trading activities, even in areas which were unsafe for

humanitarian agencies. Particularly in the south-west region, the deteriorating security situation and the outbreak of fighting could temporary affect traders as well, particularly in various districts of Zabul, Uruzgan, Nimroz and part of Helmand and Paktika.

## 7. Conclusion

The market location survey showed that all parts of Afghanistan are connected to markets and that these markets are linked to larger market centers through a vast network of gravel or dirt roads that insure a regular supply of goods. Remittances, illegal economy and competition between social-groups and/or military commanders/factions were strong pull factors for the penetration of markets in remote areas of Afghanistan.

The road network survey shows that the secondary road network has been dramatically extended during the past two and half decades of war and this has had a positive influence on trade expansion throughout Afghanistan. However, these roads are gravel or dirt roads that deteriorate rapidly and are not adapted for marketing fresh horticulture products which are the main legal agriculture crops Afghanistan could produce for exports.

The “ring road” has, for its part, considerably deteriorated. This has resulted in high transportation costs and has negatively affect prices of imported goods on the local markets. It also poses a major logistic constraint for Afghan exports to neighboring countries. The ring road section between Herat and Mazar-e Sharif has never been completed which has resulted in several regions in northern and western Afghanistan being cut off from the rest of the country. The rehabilitation of the “ring road” is a priority in improving the competitiveness of the embryonic legal Afghan economy.

In 2003, the security situation in most parts of Afghanistan was good enough for traders to operate, even in regions where security was a serious concern for aid agencies.

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## ANNEX I –

### Observations on the “Ring Road”

During various field missions, general observations on the conditions of various ring road sections were made.

From Faizabad to Kabul through Herat:

- The gravel road between Faizabad and Taluqan is under repaired by Afghan Aid, Concern and ACTED.
- The tarmac road sections between Taluqan and Kunduz and between old Baghlan, Pul-e Khumri and Mazar-e Sharif are in good condition (see picture 4).
- The tarmac road section between Mazar-e Sharif and Sheberghan is in good condition, apart from a few kilometers before Aqca. The tarmac road ends a few kilometers west of Sheberghan.
- The dirt road between Sheberghan to Qala-I Naw is by far the worst of all the sections of the Afghan ring-road.
- The road section between Maimana and Qaisar is difficult. ACTED has made a great deal of improvement in graveling the road (see picture 8). Some sections may however still be impassable in case of heavy rainfall.
- The dirt road section between Qaisar and Bala Murghab is very difficult (see picture 9). The section between Bucan and Bala Murgab needs to be built from scratch. Near Bala Murghab some road repair is being conducted by Okenden International.
- The dirt road section between Bala Murghab to Qala-I Naw is difficult (see picture 10). The section between the end of Dara-e Boom and Moghur in particular, needs to be built.
- All around Herat, gravel roads are being repaired by Ismael Khan’s administration through the provincial RRD (Department of Rural Rehabilitation and Development) and are in fair condition. However, while main roads between Herat and other provinces are generally in good condition, the roads between various district centers of Herat are in a poor state.
- Between Herat to Islam Qala on the Iranian border a tarmac road is being built reportedly with Iranian support (see picture 11).
- On the cement road from Herat to Kandahar the joints between the cement slabs have deteriorated to a point where traffic is being considerably slowed down (see picture 12). The additional travel time of 2 h 45 as compared to the pre-war time from Herat to Kandahar is mostly due to this road section. Repairing the road only requires plastering with asphalt. The first 100Km from Herat have been well repaired (plastered) and Ismael Khan’s administration (through RRD) is currently repairing the section between Shindand to Farah Rud which is badly damaged (see picture 13). For heavily loaded trucks, the degradation of other road sections considerably reduces

- their speed, while it does not affect Land Cruiser vehicles too much. Trucks are often reduced to traveling at a walking speed on the road from Herat to Kandahar. From Km 385 out of Herat (or 180 Km from Kandahar), the road had been repaired (plastered) during the Taliban regime and is in good condition.
- In the southern part of Afghanistan, sand dunes are encroaching on secondary roads leading to district centers (see picture 14).
  - The tarmac road between Kandahar to Kabul has been seriously damaged and only a few sections still are asphalted. The road is being repaired by USAID.
  - From Kandahar to Daman (Kandahar province), the Tarmac road is in good condition.
  - From Daman (Kandahar province) to Tarnac (Zabul province), the road is asphalted, but the big numbers of potholes are reducing significantly the speed of vehicles.
  - Between Tarnac (Zabul province) to Moqur (Ghazni province), the road is in very bad condition and vehicles are traveling on tracks on each side of the main road.
  - The first 10 km of the road out of Moqur (Ghazni province) is asphalted and is in good condition. Vehicles can move at a good speed. After that, the road condition badly deteriorates and is bad throughout the Qarabagh district.
  - After Qarabagh district up to Cheshma Salaar (Wardak province) the road is asphalted and in variable, but fair condition. Between Cheshma Salaar to Durani (Wardak province) the road condition is better and was reportedly graveled by local NGOs. This road section was in very bad state due to land mines and bombings.
  - Between Durani town in Wardak province (approximately 15 km South of Maidan Shahr) up to Kabul the road is in very good condition because it was asphalted during the Taleban regime.
  - Between Kabul and Mazar, the road is generally in good condition, except in the northern part of the Salang Pass.
  - The tarmac road between Kabul and Jebul Saraj is in good condition (see picture 2). The road was mined, but is now cleared. Mine workers are still working on the sides of the road (see picture 15).
  - The tarmac road between Jebul Saraj to the Salang is in good condition except in a few locations where bridges have been destroyed.
  - The Salang tunnel has been repaired in 2003 with the finishing work being done in 2004. The Salang tunnel was damaged during the war, but it was possible to get through. In spring and early summer, the tunnel used to be filling with heaps of ice which blocking the traffic. Being stuck in the Salang tunnel is a very unpleasant and unhealthy experience as engines are kept running despite the fact that there is no ventilation in the tunnel. ACTED is repairing the road to the Salang Pass.
  - Between Jebul Saraj and Khinjan at the the Salang Pass the traffic is restricted to a single lane and vehicles pass on alternate days. Vehicles have to wait in Jebul



Saraj or South of Khinjan for their day to pass. However, Land Cruiser vehicles from international organizations are permitted to cross every day.

- The road in the northern Salang was previously asphalted, but it has been considerably damaged. The road is now graveled, but is in rather good condition. The road was cleaned from mines last year.

- Between Khinja and Mazar-e Sharif, the tarmac road is in good condition.

The gravel road to Jalalabad has been damaged during the war but recently improved. The road used to be asphalted between Kabul and Jalalabad. Now, only the section between Band-e Darunta is still asphalted. Between Jalalabad and Turkham, the tarmac road is in good condition.

**Picture 8**

**Road graveled by Acted between Maimana and Qaisar (Faryab province), 20 May 2003  
(ring-road section between Sheberghan and Herat)**



Picture 9

The dirt road between Ghormach and Bala Murghab was made by the passage of trucks through the Loess hills. The “se-kotal” road (Ghormach district) is especially difficult, 21 May 2003



Picture 10

Land cruisers and other smaller vehicles have to drive on the side in order not to get stranded in the deep trenches made by trucks. Not always an easy exercise. Here between the end of Dara-e Boom valley and Moghur town (Badghis province), 22 May 2003



Picture 11

Construction of a new tarmac road between Herat and Islam Qala on the Iranian border. Note the old road on the left. Herat, 31 May 2003.



Picture 12

Broken cement road between Shindand and Farah Rud (ring-road section between Herat and Kandahar), 26 May 2003. Trucks are using a sinuous parallel dirt road in order to avoid being shaken to pieces on the damaged main road



Picture 13

Plastering of the cement road by Ismael Khan's administration near Shindand airport (ring-road). Repairing such essential sections (for trade) of the ring-road does not demand a heavy investment (mainly manual work), yet little maintenance has been done. 26 May 2003



**Picture 14**

**In the southern desert, moving sand dunes are encroaching on the roads which have to be realigned every year. Here in Loweyn of Lash wa Loweyn district (Farah province), 27 May 2003**



**Picture 15**

**Mine clearance team working on the Kabul-Jabul Seraj road, 20 June 2003**



## ANNEX II –

### Observations on the “Highland Road”

During various field missions, general observations on the conditions of some highland road sections were made.

#### Central Highlands:

- The accessibility of all roads in the Afghan Highlands depend highly on the climatic condition at the time of travel. Roads can deteriorate very rapidly within a short period of time due to land slides, etc., particularly in winter and spring (see picture 6).
- In Ghor province, most of the roads and bridges have been maintained and build by Afghan Aid and an Afghan NGO named SRO (see picture 16). Many bridges remains to be build (see picture 17).
- In Lal, the road section in Garm-ab area is being maintained by the local Hazara community under the orders of the local commander (see picture 7).
- In Bamyan province, most of the roads and bridges have been built and maintained by the French NGO Solidarity and some Afghan NGOs. The road section between Bamyan and Dara-e Suf was build by an Afghan NGO (PSD).

#### Northeastern Highlands<sup>27</sup>:

- Between Faizabad and Kishim, the road is often subjected to land slides and blockages due to bad weather. Afghan Aid is improving the road through a FFW programme. Afghan

Aid plans to completely re-build and asphalt the road between Faizabad and Taloqan. Engineering firms are tendering.

- Between Faizabad and Shighnan, a dirt road was opened up by the NGO Afghanaid using FFW. Another NGO, FOCUS is reconstructing the same road from Baharak over the Shiwa Pass also using FFW programmes. The road is only open in summer and subject to closure even then in bad weather (one day at least needed depending on the road conditions). A donkey track leads all along the line of the Panj river from Ishkashim to Shighnan, which takes two to three days. In September 2002 AKDN completed a bridge across the Panj river to connect Shighnan with Khorog on the Tajikistan side, but it is not freely open for general traffic yet.
- Between Faizabad and Baharak, the road has been improved and widen by Afghanaid over the past years.
- Between Faizabad and Sahrad Broghil, the road is very rough, collapsed and washed away in many places, carries on for about five +/- hours to Sarhad-i-Broghil.

ACTED is building a new road linking Shar-e Buzurg district to the main gravel road between Faizabad and Taluqan

<sup>27</sup> Most of these observations were made by Anthony Fitzherbert; FAO Senior International Consultant, with more than 13 years experience in Afghanistan, and more than 40 years experience in Central Asia.

**Picture 16**

**View of road section in the central Highlands, Ghor province on the way to Kotal-e Shotor-khun (camel's blood pass), 3 June 2003. The road was graveled and maintained by an Afghan NGO (SRO)**



**Picture 17**

**Many of the rivers in Afghanistan are crossed without bridges. Here in Lal district of Ghor province (central Highland road), 3 June 2003. In winter time, rivers and stream are frozen and become impassable**





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