Local Power and Transnational Resources:
An Anthropological Perspective on Rural Rehabilitation in Afghanistan

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Le bateau ivre

[…]

La tempête a béni mes éveils maritimes.
Plus léger qu'un bouchon j'ai dansé sur les flots
Qu'on appelle rouleurs éternels de victimes,
Dix nuits, sans regretter l'œil niais des falots!

Plus douce qu'aux enfants la chair des pommes sures,
L'eau verte pénétra ma coque de sapin
Et des taches de vins bleus et des vomissures
Me lava, dispersant gouvernail et grappin.

Et dès lors, je me suis baigné dans le Poème
De la Mer, infusé d'astres, et lactescent,
Dévorant les azurs verts; où, flottaison blême
Et ravie, un noyé pensif parfois descend;

[…]

Mais, vrai, j'ai trop pleuré! Les Aubes sont navrantes.
Toute lune est atroce et tout soleil amer:
L'âcre amour m'a gonflé de torpeurs enivrantes.
Ô que ma quille éclate! Ô que j'aille à la mer!

[…]

Arthur Rimbaud, 1871

The Drunken Boat

[…]

The storm made bliss of my sea-borne awakenings.
Lighter than a cork, I danced on the waves
Which men call eternal rollers of victims,
For ten nights, without once missing the foolish eye of the harbor lights!

Sweeter than the flesh of sour apples to children,
The green water penetrated my pinewood hull
And washed me clean of the bluish wine-stains and the splashes of vomit,
Caring away both rudder and anchor.

And from that time on I bathed in the Poem
Of the Sea, star-infused and churned into milk,
Devouring the green azures; where, entranced in pallid flotsam,
A dreaming drowned man sometimes goes down;

[…]

But, truly, I have wept too much! The Dawns are heartbreaking.
Every moon is atrocious and every sun bitter:
Sharp love has swollen me up with heady languors.
O let my keel split! O let me sink to the bottom!

[…]

Translated by Oliver Bernard, 1962

Introduction: situating the project

This text is a first attempt to present the reflection conducted during my stay at the Program in Agrarian Studies. My goal is to write a paper and a book on the transnational dimension of power games in Afghanistan. In the present document, I expose empirical data on the agrarian society and the reconstruction process. I would be particularly interested to receive your comments and suggestions on the theoretical framework and the analytical propositions outlined at the beginning and at the end of the paper.

The main objective of the whole project is to understand how the political economy of conflicts and post-conflicts is influenced by the circulation and the use of external resources. More specifically, I study how social organization in rural Afghanistan is changing in relation to the expansion of transnational networks of various nature. The project is built on my previous work on migratory strategies – in particular the informal remittance system set up by Afghan refugees and migrants – and on ongoing research on the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), a rural rehabilitation program primarily funded by the World Bank.[1]

The reason for this approach stems from the fact that remittances sent by migrants and projects implemented by humanitarian organizations are important external sources of financing at times when the effects of war and conflict distort rural economies. The consistency of the proposed research derives from a single theoretical and methodological premise: economic exchanges are embedded in social relations; thus, a better understanding of how goods circulate offers insight

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[1] Several field trips in 2007 and 2008 have been funded by the Agence Nationale de la Recherche (France), as a participation in a team research project entitled *Experts, médiateurs et courtiers de la bonne gouvernance: étude comparative des pratiques transnationales de démocratisation.*

into power relations.[2] When the state is weak, certain individuals, groups or institutions gain control over resources and the circulation channels for commodities, which they can then redistribute to increase their political influence and enlarge their constituency.

My aim is to associate a broader theoretical perspective on transnationalism and globalization with a fine-grained ethnography of the local power games in rural Afghanistan. Such a research is meant to participate in the constitution of an emergent field, that of an axiologically neutral social science of humanitarian action.

In my previous research on transnational networks set up by the Afghan refugees and migrants, I adopted two initial assumptions. First, Afghan refugees are not passive victims; they are actors of their lives and are able to develop efficient responses to the most demanding conditions they are facing in exile (the resilience of the Afghans). Second, spatial mobility is not only a response to war and poverty, it is a constitutive feature of social life but is perceived as a problem by states and international organizations, whose policies tend to fix people to places.

In my present research on the politics of reconstruction in Afghanistan, I have similar starting points. First, I move away from a state-centric perspective and adopt a kind of anti-modernization stance. In Afghanistan, are we confronted with a failed state or with local groups limiting successfully the interference of the central power?[3] Beyond – or even against – the idea that change has to be brought top-down, my goal is to highlight the forces at play, and deep social movements.[4] Second, I study humanitarianism – and more generally phenomena broadly subsumed under the label of globalization (which include Islamic networks[5] and organized

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[2] My general sources of inspiration here are the classical works of Marcel Mauss (1985) and Karl Polanyi (1945, 1957).

[3] I am in the process of reading Migdal (1988).

[4] On these aspects, I have started reading the work of Mayer Zald (see for instance Zald and McCarthy, eds. 1979).

[5] See the work of Faisal Devji (2005, 2008).

criminality) – suspending any normative judgment, but considering it both as a resource[6] among others which contribute to reshape sovereignty and as a bureaucratic apparatus contributing to reshape sovereignty.

Two crucial aspects, too often overlooked, could help us to have another perspective on the events which are going on in Afghanistan: generations and social classes (vs ethnicity and even gender, which may too often contribute to overlook differences in wealth and power). War has created new opportunities and spectacular upward mobility has been possible in the last three decades. Such a process is particularly visible since the fall of the Taliban with the emergence of a series of new prominent people in the vacuum created by the massive departure of the urban middle class during the 1990s. But this social movement is progressively frozen nowadays. Here, the urban-rural variable has to be kept in mind: even if all the internal boundaries have been reframed by war and migration, *jihâdi* commanders and the Taliban have somehow emerged from the rural world; while human rights activists are more often from an urban background. But beyond their differences, both sociological figures rely massively on resources coming from outside.

In this text, I first expose the different kinds of transnational resources that I distinguish in Afghanistan. Then, a section describes rural society, showing how hierarchical and violent it may be. I contrast it with the assumptions of a participatory community promoted by the NSP. In the final part, I propose to use the concept of transnational governmentality – after Ferguson and Gupta (2002) – to open a reflection on emerging forms of sovereignty.

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[6] My use of the term "resource" is quite encompassing (see Giddens 1984: 258).

Post-Taliban Afghanistan: a quest for resources and power

Since the intervention of the military coalition led by the Americans and the fall of the Taliban in late 2001, Afghanistan has experienced dramatic changes. The democratization process conducted under the guidance of the international community has resulted in the holding of two *loya jirga*, or constitutional grand assemblies (June 2002, December 2003-January 2004), followed by presidential (October 2004) and legislative (September 2005) elections. After a period of hope, these formal successes did not prevent a further deterioration of the situation on the field. The government mismanagement and corruption, the inefficiency of reconstruction projects, the resurgence of the Taliban, the rampant criminality and the explosion of drug production and trafficking are regularly invoked to explain this worrying evolution. Most observers, haunted by the question "what went wrong?", seem to consider that the recent success of the Taliban is a corollary of the failure of the reconstruction process. In so doing, I tend to think they are trapped in a policy-oriented perspective and dismiss the structural factors which are at work.

Keeping away from the idea that warlords are spoilers whose prominence is essentially based on coercion, I consider that power derives from controlling and redistributing resources. From this perspective, Afghanistan can be seen as a political arena where different actors struggle to prevail. With different strategies and means, they all seek to increase their influence and constituency in tapping the resources available, in large part originating from outside. Indeed, Afghanistan is a country with limited resources whose infrastructures – already weak in the past – have suffered greatly since 1978. Agriculture in particular (except for poppy) remains at low

levels of productivity, whereas the population growth will be a problem.[7] The government has little income and the national budget is heavily dependent on international aid (up to 93%). Considering the inevitable displacement of sovereignty induced by the massive international presence, we can speak without exaggeration of "globalized protectorate".[8] The Afghan state lacks two things which are necessary to build political legitimacy: first, a set of founding principles, a shared narrative of the past; second, the capacity to control resources and to redistribute them. As long as these two aspects, among many others, are not tackled successfully, it is unlikely that any solution to the crisis could be found.[9]

In an exploratory way, I distinguish four types of transnational networks[10] that bring material and immaterial resources in Afghanistan, resources that will be used in the power games. First, trading networks, which include illegal activities, smuggling of manufactured goods, but also – of course – drug trafficking. The amounts involved are enormous when we know that over 90% of world heroin comes from Afghanistan (Schweich 2008). Secondly Islamist networks, which allow the rebels to receive weapons and money, fighters and logistic support from a global nebulous world of supporters.[11] The migration networks, then, by which the money of millions of Afghans living in Pakistan, Iran, but also in the countries of the Arabian Peninsula or in the West, is sent to Kabul, Ghazni and Herat. The humanitarian networks, finally, which carry out

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[7] According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the country's population growth is one of the highest in the world with an average of 3.5% between 2005 and 2010. The people of Afghanistan will have tripled by 2050, from 32.3 million to 97.3 million.
See www.unfpa.org/emergencies/afghanistan/factsheet.htm, consulted on Mai 2, 2008.

[8] I borrow the expression from Pétric (2005).

[9] There is a current debate among stakeholders – especially in the United States – on the opportunity to talk with the Taliban. But as M. Nazif Shahrani pointed out in a recent conference (*Afghanistan – The Once and Future War*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, March 12, 2009), it is unclear what the talks will be about.

[10] The term "transnational" refers here to transversal ties that are established across national borders; it differs from the term "international", which refers to relations between governments, and "multinational", which designates companies whose business activities take place in various countries.

[11] Note that the government is just as dependent as the rebel group of military and logistical support from outside. But it is not – strictly speaking – a transnational phenomenon, because the relations are in this case at interstate level.

projects and provide training and employment to an emerging class of activists who occupy a growing place in the public arena in Afghanistan. Ministers or MPs, traffickers or commanders, defenders of human rights or Islamic militants, farmers or shopkeepers, fathers or mothers of large families, all Afghan men and women – or almost – are connected in one way or another with the outside world. These actors do not deploy, of course, comparable strategies. But they all share the characteristic of promoting their visions and interests relying on transnational links that can be presented in the following way:
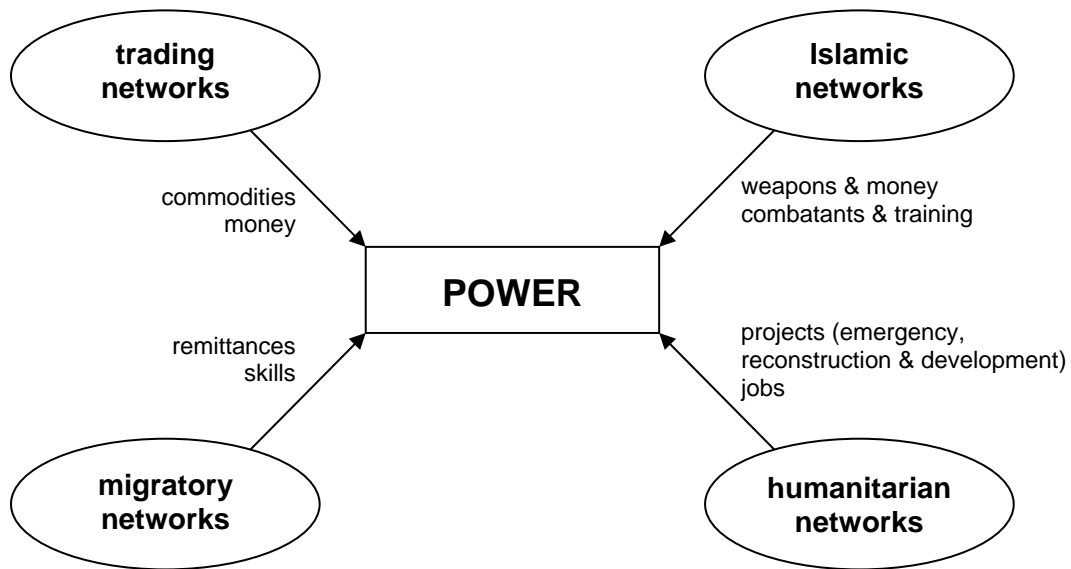
It is obviously difficult to carry out ethnography of Islamist networks and trading networks, which relate to illegal activities and are inherently elusive. There is an abundant literature on Afghan migrants and refugees and on their role in the reconstruction of the country. As for humanitarian networks, while the many international and non-governmental organizations produce a stratospheric quantity of texts (from preliminary investigations on projects' feasibility to activity reports, from internal notes to independent evaluations), they have not been sufficiently taken as an object of research themselves. Humanitarian assistance and development

are social phenomena in their own right. They constitute a factor for change and a crucial element of the social landscape and power struggles in both urban and rural Afghanistan. As such, they deserve to be studied without letting the description and analysis get trapped more or less directly by the desire to improve existing practices.

Social and political organization in rural Afghanistan

A precarious economy

Social organization and ecological conditions of rural Afghanistan are far from being homogeneous. The number of nomads, whose economy is based on both pastoralism and trade, is still important. Unlike in many other countries of the Middle East, they have a relation of proximity with the central power. Sedentary farmers go from modest landowners in most mountainous regions to tenants in many lowland places. My ethnographic data have been mostly collected in the Hazarajat, a mountainous territory with peaks as high as 5000 meters in the center of the country. Its climate is extreme: every winter, the snow may isolate some villages for several weeks; summers are mild, but short. The Hazaras living at the south of the chain of the Koh-e Baba (Day Zangi, Day Kundi, Behsud, Ghazni) are sedentary farmers. For those living in the immediate north (between Yakawlang and Bamyan), animal husbandry plays an important part in the domestic economy.

Situated somewhere between 2000 and 3600 meters, the district of Jaghuri – which is my main case study – lies in the east of Ghazni Province (shown on the map), on the southern fringes of Hazarajat. It covers 1,855 square kilometers and has a population of more than 150,000 with an average of 6.7

persons per household (Johnson 2000: 46). Given the region's climate, the high altitude and rare precipitation (less than 300 mm every year, Geokart 1984), population density (about 80 inhabitants per sq. km) is very high. When re-calculated on the basis of people per square kilometer of cultivable land, the density of Behsud region (Wardak Province, with somehow comparable ecological conditions to Jaghuri) for instance is greater than that of Bangladesh (Johnson 2000: 46). Despite the constant migratory flux, the demographic pressure remains intense. Small terraces are arranged for irrigated agriculture, using underground canals. Wheat, barley, corn, potatoes, beans, onions, carrots, turnips, clover and alfalfa are cultivated. On the slope of the mountains, dry agriculture of low capacity is also practiced. Some orchards cheer up the landscape (mulberries, apples, apricots, walnuts, almonds, etc.). Poplars supply timber. Most family owns some sheep and goats, and sometimes one or two cows. In summer, the children lead the herds up the mountains close to the villages. However, unlike the practice on the high plateaus of northern and eastern Hazarajat, people do not stay for long periods in the high altitude hamlets.
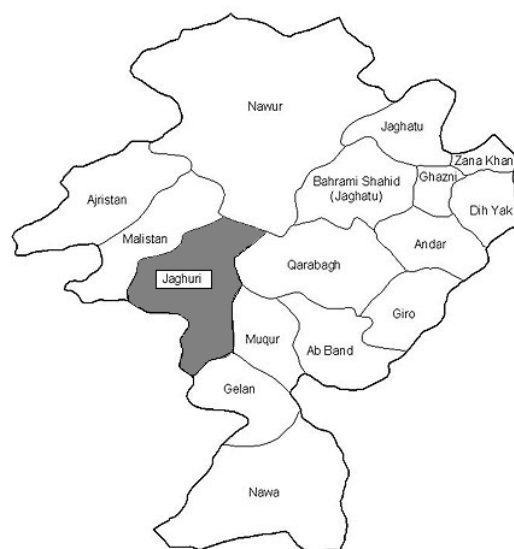
Jaghuri and the districts of Ghazni Province

Despite, or perhaps owing to, the isolated situation of the Hazarajat, trade has become more important during the years of war. Poverty and insecurity have forced many Hazaras (like other Afghans) to leave their country though most stay in touch with it. They have created extended transnational networks that structure economic exchanges (Monsutti 2004, 2005, 2009). Comparatively open to the outside world, close to the important Kabul-Kandahar road but at the same time protected by mountains, and in regular contact with the Pakistani city of Quetta, Jaghuri has played an important part in the making of these networks. Situated outside the main war zones during the Soviet occupation, the region has become a sanctuary for many trading activities, as made evident by the important bazaars of Sang-e Masha and Anguri. Merchants sell manufactured products (pots, cloth, soaps, etc.) and food (rice, cooking oil, tea, sugar, etc.) of foreign origin, particularly from China and Pakistan but also from Iran and the ex-Soviet Union.

Local elites

Between 1891 and 1893, the emir of Kabul, Abdur Rahman, subjugated Hazarajat in a series of campaign that featured massacres and atrocities (Kakar 1973; Mousavi 1998; Poladi 1989). From then on, the Hazaras, who have the disadvantage of being both a religious (they are Shiites, while the majority of the Afghan population is Sunni) and ethnic minority, were socially, politically and economically marginalized. The Hazara tribal system was partially disorganized after the region was forced to submit to the central power of Kabul and progressively penetrated, at the local level, by the state's administration (Canfield 1971).

British officers composing the Afghan Boundary Commission (like Maitland 1891) and scholars (Bacon 1958, Ghârjestani 1989, Poladi 1989, Mousavi 1998) have given different lists of Hazara tribes. Actually, it may seem vain to give a definitive list of past or present tribes. A number of

authors have already pointed out that the former tribal names tend, nowadays, to refer to territories (Schurmann 1962: 121, 122; Gawecki 1986: 16). Schurmann rightly underscores "the inconsistencies and contradictions between these various lists […]. Such lists would perhaps always tend to differ from one another. This fact mirrors the general breakdown of social organization based on blood descent groups" (1962: 128). It would be misleading to impose an arbitrary order on this diversity (Tapper 1988). As a multiform term, *qawm* exemplifies well the complexity of the Afghan social reality. Most often translated by "solidarity group" (Canfield 1973: 34; Roy 1985: 23), it refers to a group of agnatic kinsmen, but the level to which it refers varies. In turn, it can mean enlarged kinship, lineage, tribe or ethnic group, even a professional or religious group. In Jaghuri, if asked about his *qawm*, a man can answer without ambiguity by naming his lineage, his village, his district of origin or by declaring himself Hazara. Such polysemy is not due to a conceptual vagueness, but expresses the fact that the relevant identity depends on the context and the supposed knowledge that people facing each other attribute to one another.

Until the incorporation of Hazarajat within the Afghan state, powerful tribal chiefs, the *mir*, dominated the society (Roy 1985: 194; Mousavi 1998: 47, 91-92). Their sphere of influence reached several valleys. They owned most of the land and controlled the main means of production. In Jaghuri, the descendants of the *mir* are still important landowners. However, faced with the political control imposed by the central government, their power diminished. The term *mir*, emptied from its substance, is slowly becoming obsolete. Nowadays, the term *khân* is preferred when speaking of a person whose influence is based on personal wealth, kinship or other social connections.

Another category of influential men among the Hazaras is religious public figures, particularly the *sayyed*. They are supposed to be the descendants of the prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima. They form a sort of religious aristocracy and constitute a large network which goes beyond the limits of a tribe or a particular region. They tend to be endogamous. Some have managed to study in the important religious Shiite centers of Iran or Iraq and have become important spiritual guides. The *sayyed* are external to tribal genealogies and play an important part in public affairs where they act as mediators in case of conflict. Unlike the *mir*, their influence is based on spiritual precedence and not directly on political or economic power (Kopecky 1982).

At the level of local groups, other people play an essential role. First the *arbâb* (or *malek*) is chosen as a representative by the villagers. Before 1978, the *arbâb* served as an intermediary between the local group and the civil servants. He benefited from his position but is also a protective screen against external intrusions (Centlivres & Centlivres-Demont 1981-82: 523-524). Lastly there are the *rish-safid*, the "white beards", the elders of the village and more generally every person of male sex with some experience of life. They are consulted every time a decision of some importance must be taken.

An important consequence of the submission of Hazarajat at the end of the 19th century was the opening of the region to Pashtun nomads, who appropriated the best grazing lands for their herds. The relation between the two communities was difficult. Divergent economic interests added to the religious rift. The nomads were not only stockbreeders but also tradesmen. By lending money and selling manufactured products, they gained a position of economic superiority over sedentary farmers, who were then often forced to sell their properties to their creditors in order to pay off their debts. Thus they became sharecroppers on their own land

(Ferdinand 1962). During the 20th century, many impoverished Hazaras were forced to migrate to cities like Ghazni, Mazar-i Sharif and most importantly Kabul, to do menial jobs. These were difficult times for the Hazaras who were considered second-class citizens.

Lineages and modes of residence

In local discourses and representations, but also by their social practices, the district (*uluswâli*) of Jaghuri can be divided into a little more than twenty regions (*manteqa*), which have never, however, been officially acknowledged.

Our analysis is based on Dahmarda, at the extreme south of Jaghuri. It is a small valley, a tributary of the Arghandab, with no direct contact with the rest of the district. Until recently, Dahmarda was connected to the outside world by only a road hardly suitable even for all-wheel drive vehicles. In 2004, another unpaved road linking Dahmarda and the Zabul Province was built with the support of the United Nations. Both roads go across regions which are populated by Pashtuns and which are largely controlled by the Talibans nowadays. The Hazara population of Dahmarda has then developed the feeling of being under siege.

The population is difficult to estimate but is probably more than 3000. It is divided among about 450 households (defined locally as the people eating the food cooked in the same pot) scattered in small hamlets.[12] The main community buildings consist of the central religious complex and a school recently built by a local NGO. There is also a bazaar consisting of seventy shops, but it is not very active and rarely has more than a dozen shops open at the same time. There are only a few craftsmen. The properties are mostly of small dimension and settlement is scattered. My information on Jaghuri tally with those that Schurmann gives on Yakawlang (1962: 153-152):

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[12] There is probably as many people from Dahmarda elsewhere, in places such as Kabul, Herat, Quetta, Tehran, Qom, but increasingly also London, Washington DC, Adelaide, or Sydney (Monsutti 2009).

the households own an average of about 6 *jerib* of irrigated land (one *jerib* is equivalent to 0.2 hectare). In Dahmarda, only a few wealthy people own 30 or 40 *jerib*. The economy is essentially based on irrigated agriculture and the financial contribution of the men who work in the coal mines around Quetta, Pakistan or do manual labor in Iran (Monsutti 2004, 2005).

View of Dahmarda (upper basin), August 2004

Dahmarda owes its name to the ten original lineages (*dah*, "ten", *mard*, "man") composing its population. An eleventh lineage, named the "Blacksmiths", was added at an undetermined time. They are considered to be Pashtuns who took refuge among the Hazaras after having lost a tribal feud and who converted to Shiism. The largest lineages are then divided in sub-groups with their own names, a prelude to a future segmentation. One can add to these eleven lineages a few *sayyed*. There are also some refugees, designed as *farâri* ("exiled") or *hamsâya* ("neighbors"), from the region of Dai Chopan, north of Zabul Province, who were displaced by conflict at the end of the 19th century. Farmers without land, very vulnerable socio-economically, most of them went to try their luck in Pakistan or Iran during the war.

In Dahmarda, no lineage is grouped in only one site, and hamlets which are occupied by only one lineage are rare. Each neighborhood is composed of several descent groups, which members have kinship relationships in some other place. In other words, kinship and residence are not congruent.[13] The inhabitants of the valley are then related by many overlapping obligations. First, belonging to a patrilineal descent group imposes a number of duties: revenge, mutual financial aid (for example, in case of marriage, to put together the brideprice), participating in common celebrations, etc. – in short, a diffuse solidarity and the feeling of sharing a common destiny. The other types of kinship relations (through the women, by the mother, sister or wives) are often less compelling and allow more flexibility. Second, the inhabitants of the same hamlet often own in common one or two irrigation canals, whose maintenance they ensure and whose water they share, following a predefined cycle. These rights are transmitted from one generation to the next with the land, and are successively divided among the heirs from the time the canal was built. If this tight cohabitation can create conflicts, it also imposes concessions and a thorough interdependence. Third, several hamlets may join their efforts to maintain a place for reunions with a religious goal, the *membar*[14], and to pay the services of a mullah who can ensure Koranic readings and a basic teaching (Edwards 1986; Bindemann 1987: 43 *sq.*). Today, there are a dozen *membar* in Dahmarda, which serve as places of reunion and prayer, and as guesthouses and Koranic schools; one *membar-e omumi*, is common to the entire valley.

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[13] R.M. Keesing has done a typology of the articulation of kin groups with local groups. We are confronted here with the situation described in the following terms: "A community consists of several descent groups. Some or all of the local descent groups are related by common descent to groups in neighboring communities. Hence they have external ties of kinship and local solidarity with their neighbors" (1975: 43).

[14] We find here the local pronunciation of *minbar* ("chair of the mosque"). These meeting places correspond to the Iranian *takya-khâna*.

The interplay of factions and parties

Besides the many different kind of solidarity ties, both physical violence and endemic insecurity characterize social relations and everyday life in Jaghuri. The region was comparatively untouched by fighting during the Soviet occupation. However, as in the rest of the Hazarajat, internal conflicts and socio-political upheavals have been profound, reaching a proportion unknown in the tribal war. Settling of feuds can be murderous, more so now that everyone owns heavy arms (automatic guns, or even rocket launchers and flame-throwers). The beginning of the 1980s witnessed merciless conflicts between two emerging classes of leaders: the secular intellectuals, often from well-off families and affiliated to parties of Maoist inspiration, and the Khomeinist militants, coming back from Iran and generally from more modest sociological background. In the early 1980s, the latter group gained control over most of Hazarajat (Roy 1985: 194-205; Harpviken 1996). After having defeated their opponents and in spite their ideological proximity, two movements inspired by Khomeini – the Sazman-e Nasr ("Victory Organisation") and the Sepa-ye Pasdaran ("Army of the Guardians") – bitterly struggled for power (Ibrahimi 2009).

In 1989, the Red Army retired from Afghanistan. Afraid of being excluded from peace talks, the Hazara leaders understood that unity is the way to salvation. Owing to recent disruptions, this unity could only be built on a new ideological ground, that of Hazara identity. With the active support of Iran, the main Shiite factions were striving to bury their past disagreements and agree to form a vast unitary movement, the Hezb-e Wahdat-e Islami-ye Afghanistan ("Party of the Islamic Unity of Afghanistan"). The reins of power remained in the hands of the religious leaders, but the new party also incorporated many secular intellectuals (soldiers, engineers, doctors, teachers, etc.). They were trying to become indispensable and to play again a political

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role by creating NGOs that serve in such areas as health care, education, construction of roads, etc.

At a local level in Dahmarda, struggle between political parties has been added to the already deep divisions in the society caused by competition for rare resources (agricultural land, water, humanitarian assistance, etc.). The war has profoundly modified the political structures. A young cleric, originating from a secondary lineage, and linked to the Sepa took control over the region in the mid-1980. The members of previous prominent families were marginalized. After a few years, new tensions crystallized around school attendance. Formerly, there was only one Koranic school associated with the *membar*. Outside financial aid coming from an Afghan NGO allowed the construction of an elementary school in the first half of the 1990s. The director of this school was chosen among the most powerful lineage, which alone represents about a quarter of the population of Dahmarda. He came from the Nasr, a majority of which has rallied to the Wahdat, but was considered as a secular man. Having opposed social, educational and political backgrounds (prominent family, governmental schools and affiliation with the Nasr for the first; small kinship support group, religious studies in Iran and affiliation with the Sepa for the second), the school director and the cleric quickly came into conflict.

Events took a dramatic turn during the first local elections organized in autumn 1994. At that time, the lineage of the school director, for a long time politically divided, rallied around him. Afraid to see this evolution, a majority of the members of the lineages less well represented in number got together to form a coalition. A train of violence followed that ended with a series of burglaries in the bazaar, and then with the murder of the cleric (winter 1994-1995). Tension remained high and the village was divided into two factions. Political labels, assigned with as many insults, circulated at a good pace: Some spoke with disdain of the "infidels" (*kâfer*),

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referring to the Nasr faction, while others accused the "Khomeinist mullahs", having in mind the members of the Sepa.

In autumn 1995, the school director died in a landslide. Feelings did not quiet down and a new escalation of violence began. It culminated, at the end of the winter, with the massacre of more than ten men associated with the Sepa. These local events were happening parallel to the evolution of the Hazarajat, in which the Wahdat stretched its control in a quasi-uniform way against the pro-Massoud forces.[15] In Dahmarda, with the opposition having been smothered, the Nasr faction ruled without too many problems and managed to keep its pre-eminent position even after the Taliban entered the district of Jaghuri in autumn 1998.[16] In their hope to consolidate their power, its leaders – representing the old class of notables who overthrew the Khomeinist new men – later supported Karzai's government.

An ideal of community-building: the National Solidarity Programme

The National Solidarity Programme (NSP)[17] is the main project of rural reconstruction underway in Afghanistan. Launched in 2003, it is primarily funded by the World Bank through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) and administered by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD).[18] The implementation on the field is assumed on a

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[15] At that time, there were three main warring factions in Afghanistan: the supporters of President Rabbani, who refused to step down at the end of his term, consisting in Massoud, Sayyaf, and some Shiite groups (Harakat-e Islami, part of Sepa); a coalition made up by Hekmatyar, Dostum and the Wahdat; the emerging force of the Taliban. After the Taliban took Kabul in September 1996, the two other factions formed a loose front against their common enemy.

[16] The Taliban took the control of Mazar-e Sharif on 8 August 1998, then of Bamyan on 13 September. They have then been in control of most of Afghanistan until the end of 2001.

[17] *Barnâma-ye hambastagi-ye melli* in Persian.

[18] *Wizârat-e ehiâ wa enkeshâf-e dehât*. See the sites: www.mrrd.gov.af/ and www.nspafghanistan.org/.

district base by twenty-nine Facilitating Partners (FP),[19] which comprise one UN agency, twenty-one international and seven national NGOs.[20]

According to the official rhetoric, "the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) was created by the Government of Afghanistan to develop the ability of Afghan communities to identify, plan, manage and monitor their own development project. NSP promotes a new development paradigm whereby communities are empowered to make decisions and manage resources during all stages of the project cycle. The programme will lay the foundation for a sustainable form of *inclusive local governance, rural reconstruction, and poverty alleviation*" (National Solidarity Programme 2006: 1). It aims to directly bring the reconstruction funds to the rural people in establishing local Community Development Councils (or CDCs),[21] defined as "a group of community members elected by the community to serve as its decision-making body. The CDC is the social and development foundation at community level, responsible for implementation and supervision of development projects and liaison between the communities and government and non-government organizations" (National Solidarity Programme 2006: vi).

The NSP is presented as based on Afghan traditions, such as *hashar*[22] and *jirga*[23], as well as on the Islamic values of unity, equity and justice. A first phase covered the period from May 2003 to March 2007 and reached 17,300 communities. A second phase is underway from April 2007 to March 2010 and is meant to reach 4,300 additional communities, for a total of 21,600

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[19] Called *moasesât-e hamkâr* in Persian.

[20] See http://www.nspafghanistan.org/facilitating_partners.shtm.

[21] *Shurâ-ye enkeshâfi-ye qaria* in Persian.

[22] "Meeting, congregation, concourse" (Francis Joseph Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/steingass/, consulted on March 20, 2009). More specifically, the term designates a kind of collective voluntary work meant to assist a neighbor or to improve community infrastructure. The term is wrongly transcribed *ashar* in the official texts in English and then in all the related development literature.

[23] "Jirga/Shura: traditional Afghan village councils comprised of elders. Under NSP, communities are free to elect community members of their choosing to their Community Development Council, which may or may not include members of existing *jirgas* or *shuras*" (National Solidarity Programme 2006: vii).

communities, or 90% of the 24'000 villages or rural settlements and an overall budget of USD 929 million.[24] According to the NSP official literature, "a community must have at least 25 families to be eligible for a block grant. Small villages frequently join together to meet this requirement. For this reason, the total number of 'communities' targeted by NSP will always be less than the 38,000 'villages' estimated to exist in Afghanistan" (National Solidarity Programme 2006: vi).[25]

The structure of the whole program is pyramidal (see Annex), each step of the implementation and each partner being subject to crisscrossed monitoring and evaluation. The program follows different phases: community mobilization leading to the election of the CDCs; building the capacities of the CDCs' members and more generally of the local people; preparing the development plan and submitting various subprojects; and finally implementing the projects. A series of measures is proposed to ensure women's participation at each stage of the process. A tripartite agreement is signed between each CDC, the relevant FP, and the provincial office of the MRRD. Supported and guided by the FP, it is the main duty of the CDCs to prepare a Community Development Plan which identifies the development priorities and conceive some concrete projects, and then to submit it to the MRRD and eventually to implement them. An external consultant oversees the financial aspects of the project. Between 2003 and 2007, it was

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[24] As a term of comparison, the annual budget of the Afghan state is USD 960 million, accounting for 93% from international assistance.

[25] As we have seen in the previous section, the notion of village is not clear when applied to the Afghan context. "Village: As of 2007, it is estimated that 42,000 villages, also referred to as 'rural settlements', exist in Afghanistan. Previous estimates were as low as 20,000. No accurate census data is available and it is unclear if consensus has been reached on a working definition of 'village'. Ground evidence shows that several of these 'villages' comprise of less than 25 families. Going by the NSP requirement that a 'community' must comprise a minimum of 25 families, and experience during NSP Phase I, it is estimated that the villages would translate to around 28,500 NSP communities, thus creating the average of 1 NSP community = 1.474 rural settlements. However the current average used is 1 NSP community = 1.583 rural settlements" (http://www.nspafghanistan.org/about_nsp/nsp_definitions.shtm; consulted on March 19, 2009).

GTZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit), the German technical cooperation, and since 2007, Maxwell Stamp, a private economics consultancy based in London.

Two types of projects are eligible: public infrastructure (water supply and sanitation, irrigation, clinic, school building, environmental management) and human capital development. The NSP does not fund the construction or rehabilitation of government and religious buildings. The communities may receive AFS 10,000 (around USD 200.00) per family to a maximum of AFS 3,000,000 (around USD 60,000), meaning that there is no advantage for a community to be made up by more than 300 families.[26]

Compound of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Kabul, August 2004

For many actors and observers, the NSP can catalyze positive changes. Among a vast corpus of reports stressing the merits of the program, Nixon (2008) thinks it is necessary to overcome the

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[26] The concept of family is defined with a curious lack of sensitivity to the Afghan cultural context as "a husband, a wife (or wives), and unmarried children; or a single head-of-household (male or female) and his/her unmarried children" (National Solidarity Programme 2006: 7). As we have seen previously, Afghans conceive a family as the people eating the food cooked in the same pot, which often include more than two generations.

distinction between governance and development. Although several logistical issues should be addressed, he considers that the CDCs have the potential to assume more responsibility. There is a need to formalize their role beyond the NSP mandate and to allow them to become real governance institutions at local level. A few voices appear more skeptical however. In spite of having worked for the same research organization than Nixon (the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit[27]), Brick (2008) considers that electing CDCs is not a sufficient condition to create accountability. While these councils are supposed to derive their legitimacy from the local population, their very existence depends on the influx of resources drained through the MRRD and the FPs. She shows how they can compete with existing functional mechanisms, such as elders' deliberative assemblies, which have proved to be quite efficient in mediating dispute and providing public goods.

Rural rehabilitation at glance

My goal here is not to take side in the practical consequences of such a debate. It is rather to contrast the ideal of community building, participatory democracy and harmony promoted by the NSP and the features of rural Afghanistan, characterized by a high level of competition and often of violence with different local actors struggling for power. It is also to highlight the divergence between governmental institutions on the future role to be given to the CDCs and then to show the stakes represented by rural rehabilitation at the level of national politics.

It appears clearly how sharp is the discrepancy between the way rural people conceive their social and territorial space on one hand and the framework and terminology of the NSP on the other. As we have seen previously in the description of the social organization of Dahmarda,

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[27] www.areu.org.af/.

terms such as "community" and "village" – indifferently called *qaria* in the Persian version of the official texts– are far from being unproblematic when applied to the Afghan agrarian context. The notion of village has not being clarified, and we have seen that the evaluation of the numbers of villages fluctuate in the various texts of the MRRD. The homogenization bureaucratic process has not gone far in Afghanistan, as witnessed by the various maps of the country, which show little convergence in the names indicated outside urban centers. The omnipresence of the term "community" in the development literature – in spite of its old-fashioned fragrance in sociological theory[28] – further blurs the picture. In Afghanistan, it may alternatively be used to designate a social and territorial unit of the rural world, an urban neighborhood or even a tribal section, three entities which imply social ties different in nature (territorial or genealogical) and distinct relations to space (grouped residence, scattered residence, or dispersion in distant locations).

In Jaghuri, the process of community mobilization conducted by the regional FP, Care International, has not started long ago. The list of anticipated CDCs is much longer than the twenty *manteqa* or so in which the local population divide the district of Jaghuri. Nothing has begun concretely in Dahmarda, but three or four household clusters, each of which should elect a CDC, have already been identified by the FP. Actually, the *manteqa* ("region") consists in about thirty *qaria*, a term that I prefer to translate by "hamlet" rather than "village" as they may count only a handle of houses. The fact that the upper limit of the development grants is USD 60,000 seems then to constitute an incentive to split. In such an explosive context, it may reactivate the fault lines and ignite again old tensions.

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[28] The opposition *Gemeinschaft*/*Gesselschaft* of early German sociology was taking its sense in an evolutionist framework and overestimated the cohesion of small-scaled social groups.

The NSP has also caused a power struggle at national level between the MRRD and the Ministry of Interior. The former seeking to transform CDCs into a real tool of local governance,[29] whereas the latter considering the CDCs encroached on the prerogatives of the existing administrative structures. In a way, President Karzai has everyone agreed with the establishment of the Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG), which he established by decree on August 30, 2007 and which reflects a certain centralization of power. The responsibility to appoint district heads and provincial governors was withdrawn from the Ministry of Interior and entrusted to the new agency. Hoping to stabilize the country's rural regions, this creation also seems to reflect the presidential will to work closely with traditional elites (*arbâb* and *khân*) rather than with men and women committed to the principles of democracy and human rights. Initially, the NSP was based on the belief that leaders from the war are discredited among the population and aimed to facilitate the emergence of a new class of notables sensitive to the values of donors. This community building approach looked for an ideal level of solidarity in which all relationships of power would be absent and where the interests of all converge. It participated in the celebration of the virtue of civil society and grass-root organizations.

The NSP will likely to be still celebrated as an example of success by the government and the donors. But its momentum seems to have passed; its political importance seems destined to fall in a context of repositioning and redefining alliances in pre-election period (the new presidential election is scheduled on August 20, 2009). The case of NSP nevertheless shows that humanitarian assistance is now part of politics in Afghanistan. It is one of the resources that parties concerned are seeking to use in their struggles for power.

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[29] See: "Community Development Council: […] Its initial mandate is to oversee implementation of the NSP activities within the community. However, it is envisioned as a permanent local governance body that will take on additional responsibilities beyond NSP as it matures" (National Solidarity Programme 2006: vi).

Towards a transnational governmentality

The National Solidarity Programme is only one element of a much larger conceptual and bureaucratic apparatus reshaping governmentality locally, nationally, and globally. My analysis draws heavily upon the work of James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta. In a programmatic text (Ferguson and Gupta 2002), they draw two points. First, states are spatialized through metaphors and symbols, but also through mundane bureaucratic practices, characterized both by verticality (state is above civil society, and then local communities and families) and encompassment (ever widening series of circles from the family to the local community, then nation-states and the international community). In the mainstream model, civil society is conceived as a zone of mediation between the up-level of the state and the ground level of local groups. Second, they acknowledge the emergence of networks of international and nongovernmental organizations, around which a loose world of activists (human rights, women's empowerment, environment, etc.) gravitate. New forms of transnational power– including both coercion and repression, benevolence and welfare programs – emerge and challenge more familiar forms of state spatialization. They participate in a deterritorialization of state-like practices and then a deterritorialization of power, characterized by a shift of governmentality from states to non-states entities.[30]

Therefore, global politics cannot be understood through the actions of state players and groups of state players alone. There is a vast bureaucratic transnational system, including UN agencies (UNDP, FAO, UNHCR, WHO, WTO…), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, as well as the numerous international NGOs and the so-called grassroots organizations. The NGOs, in particular, are power structure transcending national borders. The scope of their activities has

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[30] Also his analysis focuses on the high-modernist ideology informing state policy, Scott (1998: 8) acknowledges that today standardizing project of social engineering are promoted by the forces of global capitalism.

few limits and extend now well beyond the protection of victims of conflicts, emergency action and humanitarian aid (a sector initially favored by the International Committee of the Red Cross, Oxfam, Médecins sans Frontières, Médecins du Monde or Save the Children) and include the defense of human rights (Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch), the fight against corruption (Transparency International), environmental conservation (Greenpeace, WWF), women's empowerment, the protection of minorities, public health and education, the promotion of democracy, and even political analysis (International Crisis Group). Let's also mention party foundations (such as the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, International Republican Institute in the United States or the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in Germany), think tanks (for instance the Hudson Institute or the Project for the New American Century, founded in 1997 by the neoconservative thinkers William Kristol and Paul Kagan, or the RAND Corporation, specialized in analyses for and advice to the American Armed Forces), and other non-profit organization promoting democracy (like the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, actively contributed to the logistic organization and monitoring of elections in Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, or Iraq), as well as religious transnational groups (being Christian or Islamic). The role played by philanthropic foundations is also important. Some examples include the Open Society Institute (OSI) headed by the American billionaire George Soros, which is very involved in the ex-Communist bloc countries, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which finances ambitious public health programs in Africa and elsewhere.

Actors in these organizations invariably present themselves as non-partisan and apolitical, while international rhetoric underlines the supposedly beneficial role of civil society in the fight against poverty and corruption or post-conflict reconstruction. These situations provoke forms of

depoliticization (Ferguson 1990) that consider interventions as merely technical and not political. However, a different picture emerges when looking at the way in which these structures are organized and networked with financial and logistical support from bilateral and multilateral agencies, foundations or large NGOs. In fact, each organization is an active participant in political games at the local, national and international levels.

This flourishing of transnational institutional players not only has consequences for the play of influences on the global level, but also contributes to the transformation of political relations at the heart of societies in developing and developed countries. Local players, in order to influence their constantly changing reality, seek to capture resources brought in through transversal channels. Initially, my intention was to focus on how the NSP was understood and transformed by the people in Jaghuri. Having been unable to visit the region due to security reasons during my last trip to Afghanistan in summer 2008, I have slightly reorientated my empirical research on the institutional aspects. I increasingly think it is a fruitful direction for further reflection. We are facing a period of redefinition of governmentality along neoliberal lines and more generally along transnational lines. The current disdain for the state as an institution capable to manage social life and celebration of the virtues of civil society must be understood in such a broad context. Civil society is supported in a country like Afghanistan by a vast transnational apparatus of governmentality. Following Ferguson and Gupta (2002), we must recognize that it is not below the state and that it will not replace it, but that it will coexist with it.

New mundane bureaucratic practices such as those promoted through the NSP tend to conflate the global and the local. They are explicitly conceived to transform societies. But their impact in the long run and the displacement of sovereignty linked to the increasing role and visibility of transnational networks have still to be better studied and analyzed. In an interview I gave to a

magazine of Médecins sans Frontières in 2004, I said that humanitarian aid could be more disruptive to Afghan society than was the Red Army. It was a provocation to launch a constructive debate on the assistance industry, at a time I was reading the work of authors like Mark Duffield or David Keen. Unfortunately, my doubts are even more profound today. Will Afghanistan be like Rimbaud's drunken boat? Seduced at first by the breeze of the global sea, but passing from exaltation to debasement, brought finally to its own deliquescence?

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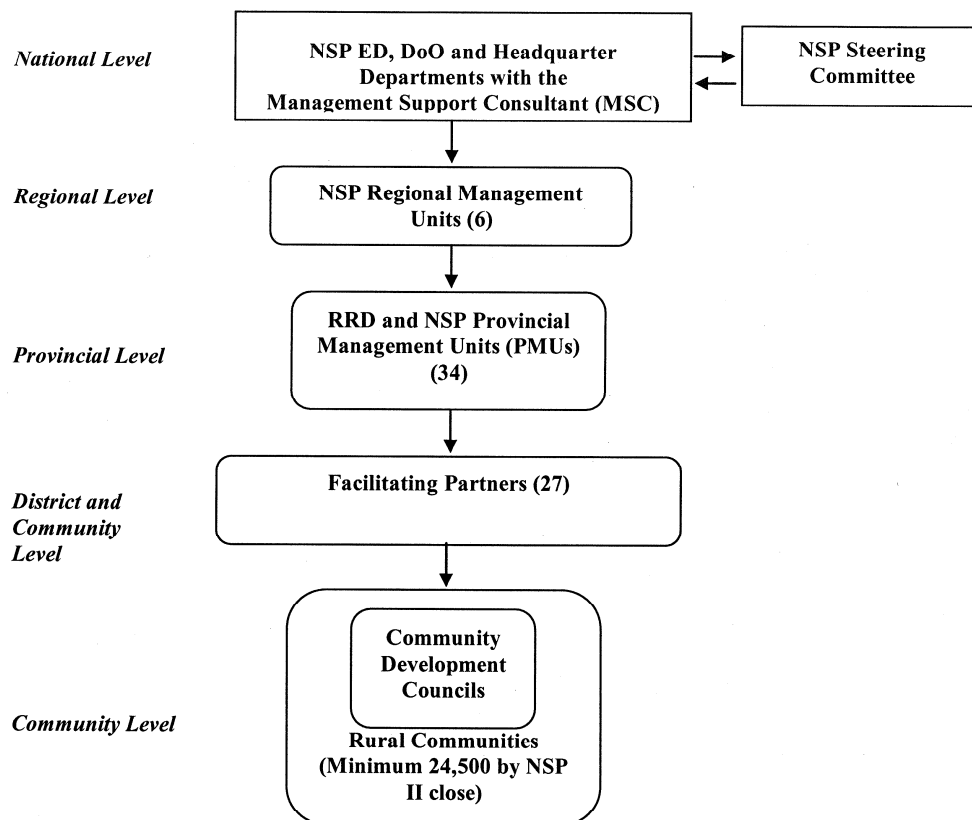
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Annex: The National Solidarity Programme

NSP Organizational Structure

National Level	NSP ED, DoO and Headquarter Departments with the Management Support Consultant (MSC) → ← NSP Steering Committee
Regional Level	NSP Regional Management Units (6)
Provincial Level	RRD and NSP Provincial Management Units (PMUs) (34)
District and Community Level	Facilitating Partners (27)
Community Level	Community Development Councils — Rural Communities (Minimum 24,500 by NSP II close)

Source: National Solidarity Programme (2007: 5).

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Development Council Elections and Regular Community Meetings

Development Council

Elected Cluster Representative

Household Clusters

Development Council meetings

Regular community meetings

National Solidarity Program

Time
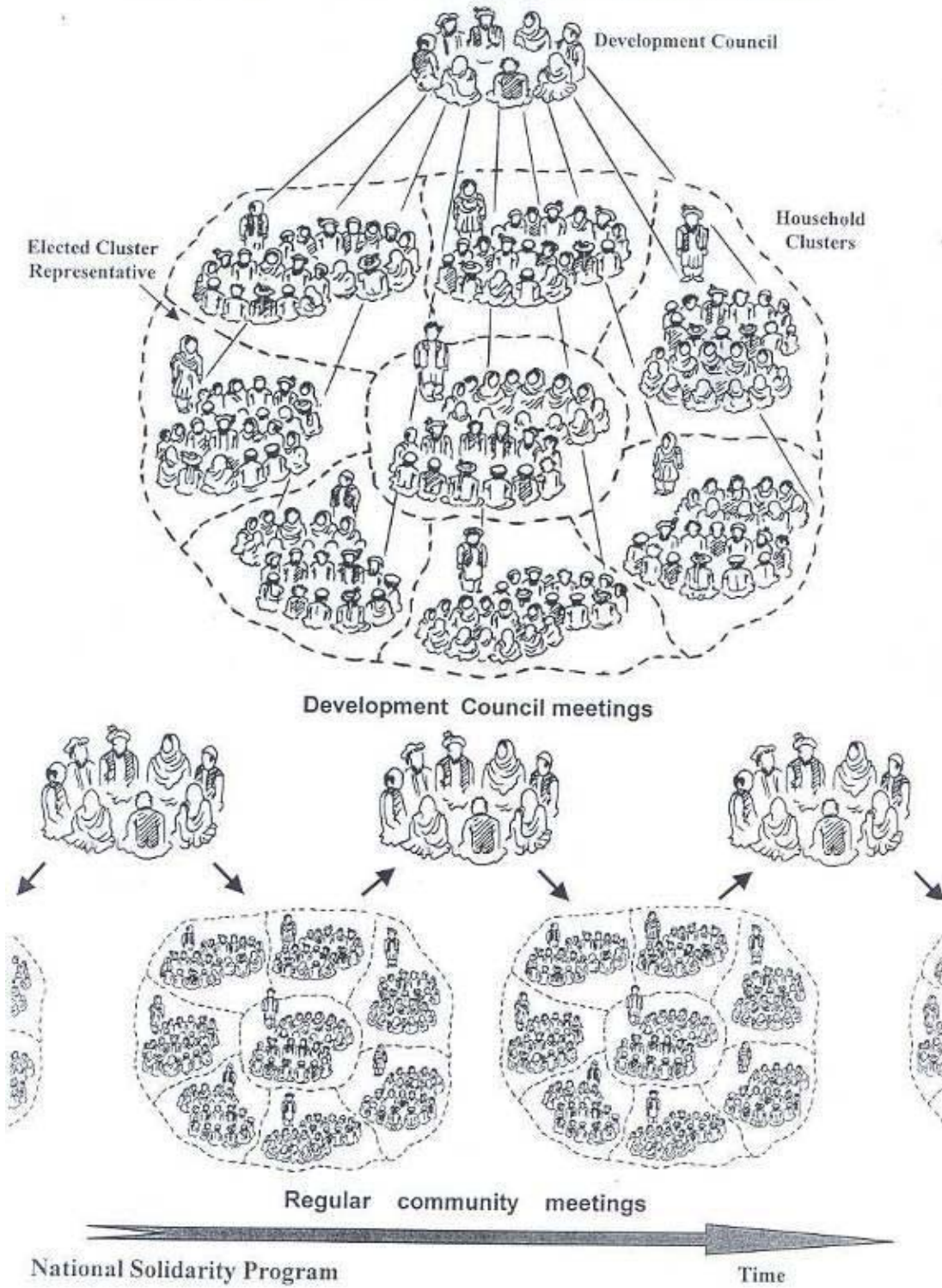
Source: National Solidarity Programme (2007: 28).

NSP Disbursement Process (Subproject Level)

Mobilization 1 Month	Planning Phase 2 Months	Design Phase 3 Weeks	Approval Phase 2 Weeks	Disbursement 6 Weeks	Subproject Implementation Phase 6-12 Months

CDC Election

Subproject Identification

Proposal(s) Submission and 1st Installment Request

Proposal Approval

1st Installment Disbursed

2nd Installment Request

Subproject Closed

CDC Registration

Bank Registration

FP submits to PMU

AFA

AFA

FP submits to PMU

CDC/FP Submits to Bank

PMU submits to NSP/HQ

1. FP submits forms 1-8 to PMU.
2. PMU reviews Forms.
3. Proposal correction by FP & NSP (if needed).
4. If satisfactory, PMU approves.
5. Tripartite Agreement is signed and submitted to NSP/HQ along with approved proposals
6. NSP/HQ processes transfer (90% of Block Grant).

Funds reach the community bank account. 90% of the Block Grant entitlement is disbursed in one installment.

Remaining 10% of block grant requested as 2nd instalment after expenditure of 70% of 1st instalment. There should be one expenditure report for each subproject. SPSRs should be submitted for all subprojects that are completed, changed or failed.

Form 2: CDC Election and Composition

Form 3: CDC Registration Application

Form 5: CDC Certificate of Registration

Forms, 4, 4a, 4b, CDC Bank Account

Form 1: Community Profile

Form 6: Community Development Plan

Form 7: Subproject Proposal(s)

Form 8: Tripartite Agreement

Form 7b: Subproject Summary Sheet

Expenditure Sheet

Form 9: Block Grant Fund Request

Request Form 1: Subproject Final Status Report

Expenditure Sheet

Report Form 1: Completion

Report Form 2: Completion Certification

Key:
Completed By NSP | Completed by CDC/FP

Source: National Solidarity Programme (2007: 34).