

Afghanistan's Citizens' Charter and Inclusive Development: Afghanistan's Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic *Kuchi* Population in the Citizens' Charter¹

Afghanistan's Nomads and Semi-Nomads are highly vulnerable and are generally excluded from development interventions. The Citizens' Charter intends to work with this population to provide key services. This brief lays out key areas that have to be considered in the design of a pastoralist program: these include assessing nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists' economic potential, their vulnerabilities, pasture access regimes, socio-economic differentiation, social and political organization, gender relations, and existing models of services provision. Each section draws on the available literature and points to next steps, whilst the conclusion summarizes the work ahead.

1. Introduction

Afghanistan's Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Pastoralists (generally referred to as *Kuchi*) are a unique population that is difficult to reach and, as a result, they are generally impoverished and excluded from mainstream development interventions and services. Socio-economic data on nomadic *Kuchi* elucidates their exclusion and marginalization. The 2007-08, 2011-12, 2016-17 National Risk and Vulnerability Assessments put the poverty headcount of the *Kuchi* population at 53.9 percent, 53.8 percent, and 58.5 percent respectively; compared to a poverty head count of 36.9 percent, 37.7 percent, and 58.5 percent, respectively.²

In terms of access to services, the *Kuchi* are also disadvantaged³: given the movements of pastoral nomads, children cannot continuously attend schools, with net attendance ratios at primary schools of 6.6 percent and at secondary schools at 1.8 percent, compared to Afghanistan attendance rates of 54 percent for primary schools and 31.7 percent for secondary schools in rural areas (and 74.3 percent for primary schools in and for secondary school 51.6 percent in urban areas). It is not surprising that the overall adult literacy rate among *Kuchi* as of 2016/17 was 5.8 percent, compared to 29.6 percent of the rural and 53.7 percent of the urban population. When it comes to health services, the situation is equally dismal, with 18.5 percent of *Kuchi* women having access to antenatal care, compared to rural women's rates of 46 percent. Similarly, merely 35.8 percent of *Kuchi* households have access to improved drinking water, compared to 56.6 percent of rural households and 91.5 percent of urban households.

2. Pastoralists of Afghanistan

Pastoral nomadism is a livelihood strategy practiced by 100-200 million people in arid and semi-arid areas of the globe where the ecology is such that agriculture and animal husbandry need spatial segregation. Grazing of livestock shapes the fertility, distribution and diversity of plants, whilst the vegetation that is maintained sequesters carbon, reduces erosion, and maintains soils and their water holding capacity. In fact, it has become increasingly recognized by scholars and scientists that pastoralism greatly contributes to conservation and sustainable use of natural resources and domestic biodiversity.⁴ Pastoralists raise locally adapted livestock breeds (e.g. the fat-tailed sheep (*Turki*) and Persian Lambs (*Qarakul*) in Afghanistan that resist disease outbreaks

¹ By Brigitta Bode, Social and Participatory Development Consultant. August 2018.

² Central Statistics Office, 2009; 2014; 2018. Afghanistan Living Condition Survey, Kabul, CSO.

³ This section is based on CSO, 2018, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-2017. Kabul, CSO: pp. v-x. See <http://cso.gov.af/Content/files/ALCS/ALCS%202016-17%20Analysis%20report%20-%20Full%20report23%2009%202018-ilovepdf-compressed.pdf>

⁴ See the 2016 'The Cancun Statement' on Conserving Biodiversity of Rangelands and Grasslands; also see the 2002 'DANA Declaration on Mobile Peoples and Conservation'.

and droughts, and are capable of walking long distances. Pastoralist's indigenous knowledge, developed over generations, is used to feed, breed, and manage livestock.

In the late 1970s, Afghanistan's livestock sector accounted for 40 percent of the nation's exports, with 80 percent of the sheep and goat herds owned and raised by the nation's pastoral population.⁵ But as a result of decades of conflict and a prolonged drought, the *Kuchi* population has suffered tremendously and by 2002, Afghanistan's livestock population had reduced by 75 percent, with 60 percent of pastoral nomads losing their herds entirely.⁶ This devastation of livestock has contributed to a considerable sedentarization of the *Kuchi* population, though their numbers are largely unknown.⁷ These are predominantly households that could no longer pursue nomadic pastoralism as a livelihood strategy because they lost their flocks or part of their flocks. There are also some better off *Kuchi* who have become sedentary, using their capital and profits to purchase land and practice agriculture and animal husbandry.⁸

The last nomad census was completed in 1978. It distinguished between full nomads and semi nomads, and highlighted that full nomads were prevalent in the south and west, in *Paktya* in the east, and in *Faryab* in the north; whereas in the northeast, from *Jauzjan* all the way to *Nangarhar*, semi-nomads were more prevalent.⁹ Semi-nomads are households/groups who practice nomadism seasonally and generally spend the winters in villages and the summer in pastures. In some cases, they leave some members behind, in others they do not. Full nomads are households/groups that practice nomadism year-round, moving with and living in their tents.

3. Nomadic and Semi-nomadic *Kuchi*'s Access to Pasture Land

Afghanistan has vast pasture and grazing areas, estimated to be more than triple the agricultural areas. *Kuchi* households/groups spend the winter in lower elevation areas. In the spring, they move to the mountain pastures of the Hindu Kush range, or in the Northeast, to the Pamir range. When summer ends, they move back to lower elevations. The nomadic lifestyle and production system depend on nomads' access and use rights to pasture and grazing land.

A. Access and use rights to pasture and grazing areas in Afghanistan are not uniform

During the late 19th century and lasting up to the 1970s, some *Kuchi* groups or notable families were provided with land grants (*firmans*) to summer pasture and grazing areas. *Firmans* were largely issued for lands in central, north, and northeast Afghanistan, whereas many *Kuchi* (regardless of ethnicity) in other areas of Afghanistan do not have such 'royal' land grants.¹⁰ In other words, the access and use rights of nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists vary across Afghanistan.

Nomad herding units are not stable entities. Instead, the search for individual annual pasture rights causes the re-organization of nomad groups. The influencing factors include the high inter-

⁵ Kelly, A.T. 2003. *Rebuilding Afghanistan's Agricultural Sector*. Manila, Philippines: Asian Development Bank.

⁶ See de Beurs, K. M. and G.M. Henebry. 2008. War, Drought, and Phenology: Changes in the Land Surface Phenology of Afghanistan since 1982 in *Journal of Land Use Science* 3(2-3): 95-111; de Weijer, F. 2002. *Pastoral Vulnerability Study*. Kabul: AFSU/VAM Unit of the World Food Program.

⁷ The use of the term '*Kuchi*' (Persian: to migrate) to include sedentary people speaks to the importance of its meaning as a cultural identity, besides lifestyle (migratory) and a production mode (livestock dependent). See De Weijer, F. 2004. National multi-sectoral assessment on *Kuchi*. Kabul: Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development.

⁸ See section 3 below, where we discuss the 'types' of *Kuchi* reflecting workshops with *Kuchi* representatives from 26 Provinces of Afghanistan.

⁹ Grotzbach, E. 1990. *Afghanistan. Wissenschaftliche Landerkunden*, Band 37. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

¹⁰ Barfield, T. J. 2004. *Nomadic Pastoralism in Afghanistan: Reconstructing the Pastoral Economy*. Washington, D.C.: Bank Information Center.

annual precipitation variability and with it, pasture productivity¹¹ and carrying capacity¹², changes in wealth status (caused by bride-price transactions, sale of livestock to cover exceptional expenses, etc.) of individual households, and quarrels and disagreements among camp residents. Further, summer camp residents may not share the same winter camps or even winter in the same province.¹³ Summer camps appear to be more stable (with more dispersed settlement patterns than winter camps), but this does not mean they are cohesive. Further, services (primarily vaccinations and sheep dipping) can also be provided in key assembly areas, which are large camps, where nomads from different camps come together prior to moving to higher pastures.

The program will have to be flexible and consider the different contexts in which pastoral nomads operate in terms of designing the institutional dimension (the Community Development Council and its sub-committees). Questions that need to be answered include: what constitutes a community amongst nomadic and semi-nomadic *Kuchi*; will notions of community amongst nomadic and semi-nomadic *Kuchi* vary across Afghanistan and what are the implications of this variance for the community driven development work? Further, existing methods currently used by Citizen's Charter used in settled communities, such as resources, social maps, and seasonal calendars, will have to be adapted to capture the unique situations of nomadic pastoralists.

B. The various land policies have created conflict amongst nomads, and amongst nomads and settled populations that have had wide-reaching consequences

The granting of land rights to some nomad groups, but not others, and the disruption to the agro-pastoral system of mountain populations as a result of these *firmands* have created conflict. Whilst these conflicts have often played out in 'ethnic' terms, the underlying reasons are property rights. Conflict over pastures continues to be a major issue and resolving this will require the coordination of several government ministries. Tensions and resentments amongst different groups continue to prevail. They will present a challenge when establishing representative community institutions. At the same time, setting up *Kuchi* Community Development Councils (CDCs) and sub-committees presents an opportunity to open a dialogue, re-negotiate terms of access and use, and overcome some of these tensions.

C. The land policies led to land grabbing by commanders and warlords, and sometimes the expansion of rain-fed agriculture in pastures

The policy of declaring pastures 'government land or public land' and the lack of enforcement for sustainable use has created a free for all, with warlords and commanders, especially in the north, limiting legitimate resource users' access to and converting pasture land to farm land. In other areas, communities created settlements for in-migrants and extended cultivation into pasture.

The Government of Afghanistan has recently written a new Law Management Law (LML), which was approved by President Ghani in April 2017. Already passed by the *Wolesi Jirga* (Lower House), the LML is now awaiting passage by the *Meshrano Jirga* (Upper House). The 2017 LML grants 'access and use rights' of public pastures to 'those citizens of the country whose job is livestock.' It prohibits buying, selling, endowing, dividing, or renting pasture land. The English

¹¹ The most productive pastures lie in the north and east of the country. These are areas of highest average annual rainfall. Research conducted during the 1970s indicates that pasture productivity ranges from 0.5 tons dry matter per hectare to 5 tons per hectare. DeBeurs, K. M. and G.M. Henebry. 2008. War, Drought, and Phenology: Changes in the Land Surface Phenology of Afghanistan since 1982 in *Journal of Land Use Science* 3(2-3): 95-111.

¹² Whilst the livestock obtains much of its nutrition from pasture lands, this is supplemented with grazing stubble from crop fields and sometimes by irrigated fodder (e.g. alfalfa).

¹³ Barfield, 2004.

(draft) version of the LML is silent on the question of ‘pasture management’, i.e. who is responsible to ensure sustainable use of the resource? This will require defining an access regime that explains who can use the land, a management strategy, and the means for enforcement. Will this be the responsibility of the villagers who live near the pasture? What will be the role of nomads in the management of summer and winter pasture and grazing lands? What will be the role of the state? Unless these questions are answered, there is a likelihood that some pastures will be treated as ‘open access’¹⁴ by competing groups with the possibility of overgrazing.

These institutional issues and questions will have to be worked out over the long term between the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), which provides the nation’s technical lead on Natural Resources Management (NRM), and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), which is the ‘community development’ lead ministry in rural areas.

4. Socio-economic differentiation amongst the *Kuchi*

The marginalization and impoverishment of the *Kuchi* coincides with the decline of pastoral nomadism that began in the early part of the 20th century and has culminated in the current situation. The reasons for this decline are multiple: the loss of pasture to cultivation; the closing of the border with Pakistan, and with it, the reduction of accessible winter pastures; the various droughts (1971/1972; 1995-2002/3; and 2008) that led to herd losses;¹⁵ and during the past few decades, sustained conflict, which affects nomads’ movements.¹⁶ This is not to say that all *Kuchi* are poor; in fact, there are nomadic and semi-nomadic *Kuchi* who have invested in land and business (often transport) and are well off; there also sedentary *Kuchi* who have used their profits to buy farm land and settle down. Some are fully settled but have maintained their herds and hired shepherds to go to summer pastures.¹⁷ However, compared with rural and urban populations, the prevalence of poverty amongst *Kuchi* households is considerably higher.

There is virtually no data that disaggregates nomad and semi-nomad groups to understand the socio-economic differentiation amongst them. Discussions with *Kuchi* representatives have provided the following impressionistic picture:

- Sedentary: 30-40 percent of the pastoral population own no livestock and no land and eke out a living through the sale of daily wage labor.
- Semi-Nomad: 30-40 percent are semi-sedentary, move seasonally with their herds and leaving family members behind or live in villages in the winter and move to pastures only in the summer.
- Nomad: 20-40 percent are groups/families that have retained their nomadic lifestyle (regional variation).

Just as with the sedentary population, Afghanistan’s pastoral families practice some social customs that are detrimental to families’ economic well-being. These include high bride-prices (as high as AFA 600,000 in *Paktika* and for pastoralists as high as 100 sheep in *Helmand*), and prohibitive costs associated with weddings and funerals. These expenditures drive families to take loans, creating a cycle of debt that is difficult to extricate oneself from and contributes to nomads settling down and giving up animal husbandry.

¹⁴ See Annex 1 for definitions of various public land tenure types

¹⁵ Barfield, 2004:3, writes that it takes 40 sheep to support a family and those that fall below that cannot maintain a nomadic lifestyle.

¹⁶ Grotzbach, E. 1990

¹⁷ Barfield, T. 2004.

In addition to exploring the differentiation within a nomad/semi-nomad group, there will be a need to understand the composition of their incomes. At the same time, there needs to be a sound understanding of the relationships amongst nomads and semi-nomads; are there patron-client relations? Is there indebtedness? Finally, there is a need for ministries to work closely with MRRD, responsible for the Citizens' Charter, providing data to the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) on pastoralists camps, movements, and coordination in terms of establishing and building capacity of NRM committees from an institutional perspective with MAIL providing the technical support (pasture management, livestock health, etc.), as well as support in terms of the value chains of various key products and the market opportunities that exist.

5. Social and Political Organization

Nomad and semi-nomad *Kuchi*, just as sedentary populations, have local leaders. Of importance, are leaders that are called *Sarkhels*.¹⁸ One of the duties of the *Sarkhel* is to host visitors and speak for the group to the outside world. Decisions, however, such as when and where to migrate, are reached by consensus.

There appears to be considerable variation as to how pastoral groups organize their activities; however, flock size is a key factor. Flocks are generally individually owned (unless they are owned in an extended family) and may vary in size from 50 to 500 sheep.¹⁹ A smaller flock moves too fast and a larger flock is difficult to control by one shepherd. Flock size fluctuates, based on various factors: disease, cold, inheritance, bride-price, break-up of the family (a son who wants to establish his own household), and the managerial ability of the flock owner.²⁰ Most groups (generally close or distant relatives) operate between 400-600 sheep on migratory routes and combine their flocks.

Our understanding of *Kuchi's* social organization is limited and more has to be learned. The empirical work on *Kuchis* is largely from the 1960s through the 1990s. There is little knowledge as to their current practices and social organization and how they have adapted to the conflict environment. Further, we need to learn more about how summer camps are organized and the variation that exists so that Community Development Councils and their sub-committees can be organized reflecting the reality on the ground.

6. Gender Relations

Nomad *Kuchi* women, just as their sedentary sisters, are predominantly responsible for reproductive activities (child rearing, cooking, serving food, cleaning, washing clothes and utensils, sewing, building clay ovens, weaving and repairing tents). However, the gendered division of labor amongst *Kuchi* is more flexible than amongst sedentary populations.²¹ Men, when needed, provide support with childcare, cooking, fetching water, and generally are responsible for collecting fuel wood, all tasks that men in sedentary communities rarely if ever carry out. *Kuchi* women are also engaged in productive activities: milking, processing milk, knotting carpets, assistance in lambing, and migrating, pointing to their pivotal role in maintaining the nomad lifestyle. Activities, such as herding, which require movement outside the camp onto the pasture, are largely undertaken by men; although occasionally women may also participate. As Tapper

¹⁸ Glatzer, 1996, Grotzbach, 1990.

¹⁹ Note: Afghan Nomads and semi-nomads largely hold sheep (generally 90 percent of their flock) as they are more profitable and easier to herd. They may also keep some goats (to make their tents from goat hair) and pack animals.

²⁰ Balikci, A. 1981.

²¹ Rao, A. 1986. "Roles, Status, and Niches: A Comparison of Peripatetic and Pastoral Women in Afghanistan" in *Nomadic Peoples*, 21/22.

has noted: among Pashtun pastoral nomads there appear to be few “... specific taboos prohibiting the participation of either sex”²²

When it comes to control over household resources, products, and wealth, however, *Kuchi* women tend to be as disadvantaged as their sedentary counterparts, with men controlling productive resources. Thus, pastoral women are entirely dependent on their husbands with virtually no chance of convert their labor power in productive activities into income that they may have access and control over.²³ Similarly, women’s decision-making powers are limited. However, women may influence decisions in terms of alliances, something which has largely to do with the need to seek pasture near areas where women may have relatives.²⁴

Just as the Citizens’ Charter’s community development work explores women’s mobility, work, and wages in settled communities, there is a need to further explore *Kuchi* women’s freedom of movement and their roles in productive activities amongst different nomad groups and their compensation. Further, given women’s huge work load in camps, CDC and sub-committee activities should be carefully considered in terms of timing, so as not to further overburden women.

7. Services Provision to Semi-Nomadic and Nomadic Pastoralists

Arrangements to provide development services will have to consider the ‘camps’ in which nomadic and semi-nomadic groups reside for the longest period of the year – the summer camp and along migratory routes. As *Kuchi* groups tend to disperse and move to different winter camps, CDCs may have to be flexible and be reconstituted each year at the summer camp. In all likelihood, a certain percentage of CDC members will change. It is proposed that CDCs and their sub-committees are, as Barfield suggests, organized along geographic lines: all households that use a summer camp. This may include different tribes, sub-tribes, and ethnic groups. If the number of households exceeds 200 and/or if the distances between different summer camps in the same grazing lands are too far, MRRD may consider establishing more than one CDC, but cluster them, so that key activities, such as pasture management can be coordinated amongst all resource users, including local populations that reside nearby. Pasture assessment, with the support of MAIL, and subsequent management strategies to increase the productivity of the pasture land, must include the resource users (both nomad and local populations). Creating common NRM sub-committees among nomads and the sedentary local populations is key, particularly in areas, where their relationships are fraught with tensions.

Unlike in the Citizens’ Charter, in which there are Minimum Services Standards and drinking water for all, plus one of three additional services (transport, irrigation, or energy), MRRD might consider a basic block grant model, with a negative menu. Key services that *Kuchi* representatives in the various meetings have highlighted include drinking water, solar panels to generate electricity, education for children and access to basic health services, basic services for livestock, and economic development support to improve their goods and market them. A key investment will be drinking water (for humans and livestock) in summer camps, however, care should be taken so that overgrazing is not encouraged; in fact, it is the water limitation in summer pastures that often limits the number of livestock and reduces the chances of overgrazing.²⁵

²² Tapper, N. 1980. Matrons and Mistresses. Women and Boundaries in Two Middle Eastern Societies. Archives Europeennes De Sociologie, XXI(1): 59-79.

²³ Rao, A. 1986: 164.

²⁴ Grotzbach, 1990; Glatzer, 1981.

²⁵ Barfield: 2004: 7

Other services that the *Kuchi* representatives requested are fodder storage in winter camps and along migratory routes, mobile schools and clinics, voting centers, rehabilitation of the roads that constitute key migratory routes, and access to national Identity Cards. Some of these services – voting centers, access to identity cards, livestock services (vaccinations), and sheep dipping stations to control disease, could be provided at key mountain passes, bridges, river fords and assembly areas, where nomads concentrate during migration.²⁶ Repair of roads and bridges of key migratory routes should also be considered because this can greatly aid nomad's ability to access pasture areas.

It is also proposed that *Kuchi* groups along their migratory routes are linked with CDCs from villages they cross or are nearby to assist with their immediate needs: drinking water for humans and livestock, purchase of fodder or access to stubble in crop lands. This is not to say that nomad groups have not already established such contacts, but a more systematized approach through which CDCs and local populations are sensitized to the situation of the nomad *Kuchi* and the importance of this vulnerable population to the nation's economy, ecology, cultural heritage (their unique skills in knotting carpets, and other activities) and the social poverty they face. Finally, teachers, social organizers, mid-wives, nurses from among the *Kuchi* population should be trained to work in the summer camps, where they also reside, so that women can access key services and girls can attend school in the summer camps. This will ensure that the initiative is sustainable, once the sub-program ends.

8. Conclusion

The work ahead entails building on existing knowledge to explore how, over the past few decades, Afghanistan's pastoral population has adapted to a state of conflict. This will require an understanding of pastoralists' movements. Program staff will need to work with pastoral communities to develop maps that show winter and summer pastures, as well as assembly areas), camp compositions, the social and political organization of their 'communities,' and gender relations - and how all of these vary across nomad groups. Maps of migratory routes should identify infrastructure that needs repair (bridges, roads) and resources should be mobilized for other ministries responsible for transport infrastructure to take on the work. The program should work with other ministries to consider 'one stop shops' in nomad assembly areas to provide identity cards, register voters, etc.

Key services at the summer camps, such as drinking water and renewable energy, should be planned for through innovative, sustainable, and ecologically friendly ways. All engineers should be trained in terms of water management in high pasture areas to ensure that water provision does not lead to over-grazing. Schooling for children and basic health services should be provided through trained staff from within the *Kuchi* community. Coordination and cooperation amongst different line ministries will be crucial. For instance, the MRRD staff should work with Arazi (the Land Authority) to understand the new Land Management Law and with MAIL to determine sustainable management arrangements of grazing and pasture lands and to flesh out a more detailed role for NRM sub-committees in terms of pasture land.

Just as with the data that is collected for the settled population (socio-economic differentiation, women's movements, etc.), the program must develop community profiles to capture this data. All of Citizens' Charter's analytic tools have to be adapted, field-tested, and revised, and all other processes (scorecards, grievances, social audit, and various monitoring formats) will have to be adapted to the *Kuchi* situation).

²⁶ Barfield, 2004: 6

Finally, there should be a means to sensitize CDCs and their communities that lie near migration routes or pasture areas and work with them to consider how they might help ease the hardships that nomads face during migration.