

WAKHAN WOLUSWALI IN BADAQHSCHAN.
OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS FROM AFGHANISTAN'S PERIPHERY

With 3 figures, 5 tables and 3 photos

SABINE FELMY and HERMANN KREUTZMANN

Zusammenfassung: Wakhan Woluswali in Badakhshan. Beobachtungen und Reflektionen aus der afghanischen Peripherie

Die konzeptionelle Wiederentdeckung der „drei Welten“ bildet den Ausgangspunkt für eine empirische Untersuchung in einem darin als „prämodern“ bezeichneten Staatswesen. Afghanistan dient als räumliche Fallstudie für die Gleichzeitigkeit von Globalisierung und Fragmentierung. Zentralisierte Macht- und Infrastrukturen werden in ihrer Wirkung auf die afghanische Peripherie untersucht. In einem abgelegenen Teilbereich der Kontrollsphäre der Nordallianz werden die gegenwärtigen Lebensbedingungen, Austauschbeziehungen und Abhängigkeitsstrukturen vergleichend mit Erfahrungen aus der Zeit vor der Saur-Revolution 1978 kontrastiert. Aktivitäten internationaler Entwicklungsorganisationen sind durchaus zu verzeichnen, wenn auch die Zukunftsaussichten eher ein düsteres Bild abgeben. Soziale und regionale Disparitäten scheinen sich zu verschärfen und ungleiche Partizipationschancen zu vermehren.

Summary: The rediscovery of “three worlds” is taken as a conceptual point of departure for an empirical survey in a country which is described in that theory as “pre-modern”. Afghanistan is the spatial laboratory for a case study in which the contemporaneity of globalization and fragmentation is envisaged. Centralized power and infrastructures are analysed towards their effectiveness in the Afghan periphery. In a remote part of the Northern Alliance's sphere of control an assessment of the livelihood conditions, exchange relations and dependency structures is attempted in combination with a comparison of certain aspects from the period prior to the 1978 Saur Revolution. Presently international development organizations are well represented although their activities seem not to affect the poor prospects for the future. Social and regional disparities seem to increase and lead to further growth of inequality.

1 *Globalization and fragmentation in Afghanistan's context*

Globalization was suggested by its prime advocates as the future development strategy for ubiquitous welfare in the post-Cold War era. Latest at the brink of the new millennium it has been observed that fragmentation was an integral part of the same process (MENZEL 1998; SCHOLZ 2002). In fact the development gap between nation states and regional disparities inside these still existing administrative structures have significantly widened (KREUTZMANN 2002). Apologetics of “modern” structures such as nation states and the discontinuity between First and Third World countries seem to revive former concepts. A recent debate even suggests the “comeback of three worlds” (MENZEL 2003) and cites an influential text by ROBERT COOPER (2002) in which the world is structured in three categories: post-modern, modern, pre-modern. Afghanistan definitely qualifies for the last category. The important factor for our discussion is the acknowledgement of the existence of a nation state in which the effects of globalization are slightly felt, where fragmentation is the predominant feature of statehood. Warlordism, terrorism, drug economies, money laundering and organized crime are somehow related to globalization as well as develop-

ment aid while the society is characterized by exclusion of social groups, restricted access to infrastructure assets and unequal distribution of national resources to a limited number of benefitters. Afghanistan could pose as a role model for this type of “pre-modern” societies. The Afghan society experienced their so-called “internal war” as a world war which was significantly financed by outsiders who supplied mercenaries, landmines, weapons and ammunition from a host of producing countries. Through opium cultivation and its processing into heroin the link to global markets was established, this valuable cash crop found high appreciation in the world market and production figures grew from 200 t in 1980 to culminate at more than 4,500 t in 1999, between two thirds and tree quarters of world consumption are produced in Afghanistan in recent years (UNODC 2003). Afghanistan grew to become the prime supplier of opium derivatives for the world.

Sovereignty of the nation state has never been challenged by any contender for supremacy in Kabul during all fightings since the Saur Revolution of 1978. The Islamic State of Afghanistan very much exists and receives international support in the process of constitutionalisation and rebuilding of state functions. During the Petersberg process a centralized approach was

favoured which gave prime influence and superior control to the predominantly Tajik victors of the Northern Alliance. The exclusion of other regions and groups is reflected in the fragmented state of affairs within the country. Pashtun alienation and the regionalization of power such as the rule of Ismael Khan in Herat, the drug economy of the South and the absolute rule of commanders and petty chiefs in a number of locations give ample evidence for the missed chance of an alternative approach (cf. BARAKI 2003; ICG 2003; KREUTZMANN 2004). The option of inclusion and representation of regional strongholders in a set-up characterized by decentralized state activities was ruled out. The enhanced fragmentation and polarization within Afghanistan with its concentration in the capital Kabul are obvious to most observers by now.

In this paper we are reflecting about the situation in one of the most remote locations of Afghanistan. The northeastern district of Wakhan Woluswali is embedded in Badakhshan province and has been part of the territory controlled by the Northern Alliance throughout the fight against the Taliban forces. Nevertheless,

the effects of the centralized regime, the drug economy, infrastructure and communication deficits are severely felt in Afghanistan's periphery. Wakhan Woluswali is introduced as a case in point where the shadows of power concentration can be exemplified as the result of fragmentation and exclusion.

2 Wakhan – Frame conditions and modernization

Wakhan Woluswali is the administrative term for the northeastern narrow appendix-like strip of Afghan territory. Not only due to its topography and orography this area has a long record of being neglected within the context of Afghan administration, infrastructure development and spread of social amenities. The spiritual and political leader of the Wakhi community, Shah Ismael from Qala-e Panja, put it this way during our conversation: “To what country does Wakhan belong? We do not know if it is part of Afghanistan, Tajikistan or PR of China because we do not feel any interest and responsibility of a caring government and long-lasting

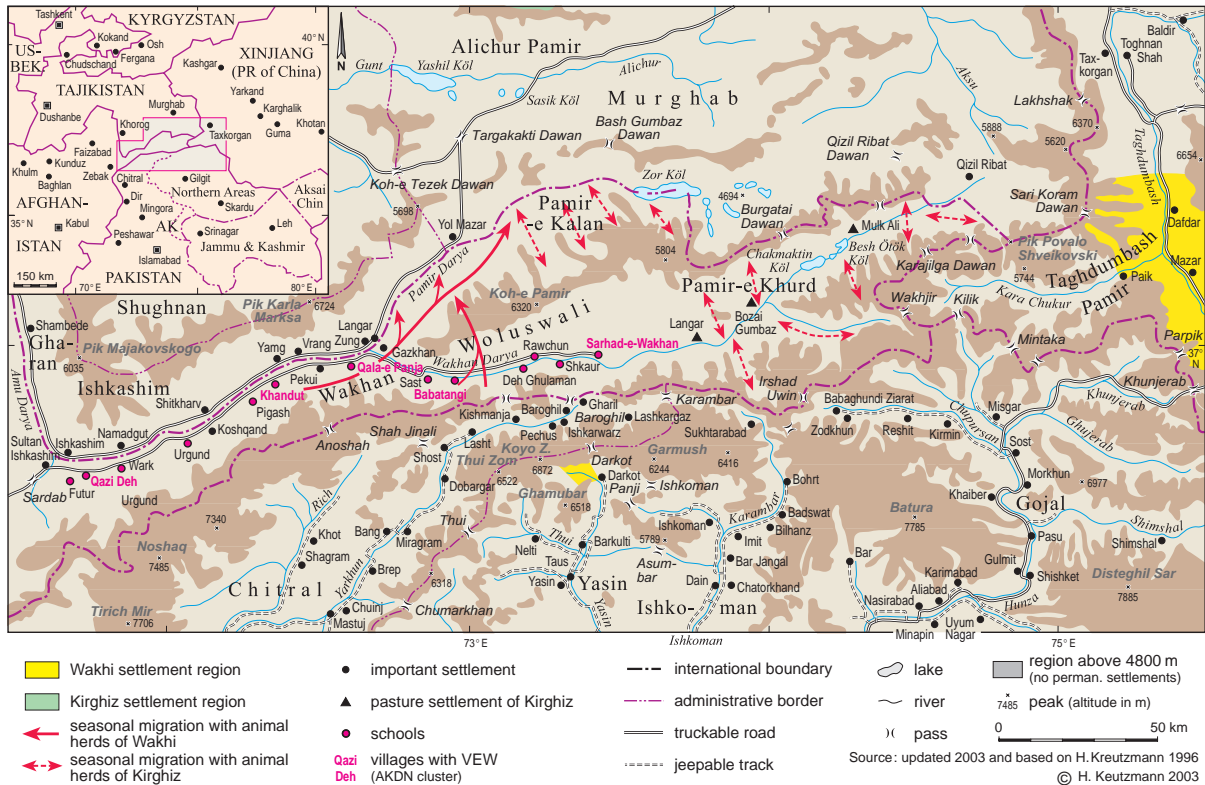


Fig. 1: Settlements, social infrastructure and seasonal migration patterns in Wakhan Woluswali, Afghanistan
 Siedlungsmuster, soziale Infrastruktur und saisonale Migrationswege in Wakhan Woluswali, Afghanistan

effects of development measures here. Therefore my participation in the Loya Jirga and my recent journey to call on the ministries in Kabul seem to have been in vain” (Interview Qala-e Panja, July 21, 2003).

The territorial area of Wakhan Woluswali (Fig. 1) covers 8,936 km² of mountainous country stretching between 2,570 m and 7,485 m. Ecological zones vary from desert conditions in the valley bottoms to artemisia steppe in medium elevations and to meadows and grassy patches in the higher elevations forming what in local terminology is addressed as *pamer* (high pasture in Wakhi language). Thus inhabitable space is scarce and confined to mainly two ecological units:

– Agricultural settlements for irrigated crop farming are nearly exclusively located in the valley bottoms of the Amu Darya and the Ab-e Wakhan between 2,550 m (Futur) and 3,360 m (Sarhad-e Wakhan or locally more frequently called Sarhad-e Baroghil). Irrigated oases are situated on alluvial scree slopes, fans and river terraces within a steppe to semi-desert environment. Those comparatively flat and low-lying regions are the sole agro-ecologically suitable areas for irrigated crop farming of cereal and tuber crops such as wheat (Wakhi: *ghedim*; *Triticum aestivum*), barley (*yirk*; *Hordeum vulgare*), millet (*jirz*; *Panicum mili-aceum*), peas (*shakh*; *Pisum sativum*), beans (*baqla*; *Vicia faba*), potatoes (*kachalu*; *Solanum tuberosum*) and pulses (*krosh*; *Lathyrus sativus*). In small quantities rapeseed (*sharsham*), vetch and flax are cultivated in the lower-lying villages.

– The second ecological area of agricultural interest are the high pastures either located in the river valleys above the settlements in easy reach for proximity pastures or daily grazing grounds. The most valuable pastures are located in the Little Pamir – *Pamir-e Khurd* (Dari) or *Kichik Pamir* (Kirghiz) – and the Great Pamir – *Pamir-e Kalan* (Dari) or *Chong Pamir* (Kirg.). Those extensive natural pastures are the wealth of the region which were praised as far back as during MARCO POLO’s travels (POLO 1984, 73). The extended natural grazing grounds offer high quality fodder during the summer months and permit Wakhi mountain farmers seasonal usage and Kirghiz nomads to keep their herds there all-year-round (cf. CURZON 1896; KREUTZMANN 1996, 2001, 2003a, b). In the past the natural fodder resource has permitted a profitable animal husbandry which enabled the local Kirghiz to enjoy a substantial degree of wealth prior to the Saur Revolution (cf. SHAHRANI 1979). Events of the last quarter century have changed migration and utilization patterns and the success of agricultural enterprises dramatically. Herds are usually comprised of mainly sheep and goats (they are the prime marketable product of livestock-breeding), yaks in the higher elevations (mainly for home consumption

and transport), horses, donkeys, and Bactrian camels (for riding and transport).

The Wakhan Woluswali is inhabited by two ethnic groups (see Fig. 1): Wakhi and Kirghiz. Both groups are on first sight distinguishable by their prime subsistence strategy.¹⁾ The Wakhi mountain farmers follow a strategy which is based on combined mountain agriculture (cf. EHLERS a. KREUTZMANN 2000). They speak a language called *khikwar* or *sposik* by themselves and Wakhi by others. Wakhi belongs to the Pamirian language group of the Eastern Iranian branch of the Iranian languages within the Indo-Iranian group. Kirghiz pastoralists follow in general a mountain nomadic approach to utilize the high pastures of the Afghan Pamirs. Their Kirghiz language belongs to the Altaic group and is closely related to neighbouring Turkic languages.

Besides language differences, Wakhi and Kirghiz follow different belief systems. Kirghiz communities tra-

¹⁾ “Two major strategies are used to utilize the pasture potential of Western High Asia given the ecological constraints and socio-political circumstances. They are nomadic animal husbandry and combined mountain agriculture (EHLERS a. KREUTZMANN 2000):

(i) Nomadism incorporates the advantage of mobility. Traditionally nomadic groups were able to exploit natural resources at dispersed locations. Great distances, in the order of several hundred kilometres, separate economically – valuable mountain pastures from winter camp sites, with areas of less economic interest lying between them. Functional migration cycles can be recognized in the region. They generally comprise long stays in high-altitude pastures during the summer with winter grazing in low-lying basins in the northern foothills or the plains of the Inner Asian mountain arc. The nomads depend on being tolerated as a mobile group and being able to pay grazing fees, if applicable, in both areas.

(ii) Combined mountain agriculture has the advantage of simultaneous fodder production in the permanent homesteads for herds which are grazed in the high pastures during the summers. The limiting factor here is the provision of up to nine months feed which has to be produced on private or common property village lands. The Wakhi houses are usually located at the upper levels of permanent settlements in single-crop farming areas. Consequently access to the pamir pastures involves shorter migrations and some mobility within the summer habitations. Fodder here is comparatively plentiful but only available for a short period, feed storage and transport to the homesteads are of limited importance. Both approaches can result in competition for natural resources in the same location and they have frequently been discussed from that perspective” (quoted from KREUTZMANN 2003a).

ditionally comprise of Sunni Muslims, while the Wakhi almost exclusively belong to the Shia Ismaili sect which acknowledges the Aga Khan as their spiritual head. The religious practices influence daily life and local cultures as religious festivals and rituals play prominent roles beyond rites of passage. Kirghiz culture is characterized by the lifestyle of migrating pastoralists including transitory dwellings in the form of the round felt-covered yurts displaying artefacts of local folklore (cf. DOR a. NAUMANN 1978; KREUTZMANN 2001, 2003a; SHAHRANI 1979). In contrast Wakhi houses are built of stone and mud-plastered walls and are scattered among the village lands in irrigated mountain oases. Wakhi herders migrate to high mountain pastures where simple houses provide shelter. The majority of household members remain in the villages where cultural life is centred (cf. FELMY 1997; KREUTZMANN 1996). Both life-styles exhibit close affinities to the different traditions and affiliations of the two groups.

The scattered population is given by the acting-Woluswal, Mullah M. Jon, in Khandut as consisting of 13,400 inhabitants split-up in about 1,100 Wakhi households in the villages located in the valley floor – nearly equally divided between the low-lying western Amu Darya or Pyandsh valley (2,570–2,850 m) and the higher-elevated settlements in the eastern Ab-e Wakhan valley (2,850–3,360 m). In addition there are 110 Kirghiz *kibitka* (yurt households or *akoi* (white yurts), in Wakhi *khirgo*) in the Great Pamir and 140 Kirghiz households in the Little Pamir, all of them located above 3,500 m a.s.l.

About 80 years ago the population of Afghan Wakhan was given with 3,500 inhabitants while it had doubled when an enquiry by the Afghan Ministry of Planning and Finnconsult was conducted by the mid-1970s (KREUTZMANN 1996, 133). Their findings for Wakhan Woluswali were not very encouraging: “There is hardly any development potential in this area. The living conditions are hard, and development of the basic industries, agriculture and animal husbandry, would be more expensive than direct aid. However the economies of exploiting part of the peat resources available in the Pamirs ... are worth studying. Another probably more realistic way of improving the economy of the people of Wakhan would be to increase organized tourism in this area. A Marco Polo sheep hunting programme organized by the Afghan Tourism Organization has already been in effect for more than 10 years, and also mountain climbing tours have been organized. There is still, however, a good potential for increased tourism in Wakhan” (FINNCONSULT 1976, 26).

The theory of modernization as the only tool for development inspired that enquiry which stamped subsis-

tence-oriented agriculture and animal husbandry as traditional and backward while tourism and trophy-hunting were labelled as modern. When the trophy-hunting camps were seasonally established the local farmers and husbanders enjoyed for the only time of the year medical services (cf. PETOCZ 1978; PETOCZ et al. 1978).²⁾ The highly sophisticated utilization of natural potential and the generated wealth enjoyed during the same time by very successful Kirghiz pastoralists escaped the scrutiny of the bureaucrats and consultants of the time. The then leader of the Kirghiz community, Haji Rahman Qul (who died in exile in Turkey in 1990) enjoyed a livestock property of his own which was equal in size to the combined livestock herds of 1,250 households of Wakhi and Kirghiz inhabiting Wakhan Woluswali today. His strong leadership and the introduction of the *amanat* system (long term herding arrangement by giving animals for safe-keeping to herders; cf. SHAHRANI 1979, 179) have proved that the fame of the pasture potential of the Pamirs is a real property of the region and can be successfully utilized. Thus the potential of the Wakhan is presently not fully exploited and scope for improvement is ample.

Nevertheless, present conditions seem to be bleak and have to be interpreted by their embeddedness into global contexts and local conditions. In the following a historical background is provided in order to qualify the socio-economic assessment of the present survival conditions of the inhabitants of Wakhan Woluswali.

3 Statement of the historical background for the comprehension of the present situation

The administrative unit which is now addressed as Wakhan Woluswali was the result of international boundary creation during the “Great Game” (KREUTZMANN 1996). The area of the Afghan administrative unit was created in the late 19th century when the then superpowers Tsarist Russia and British India agreed upon creating Afghanistan as a buffer state. The philosophy of their consensus was that both superpowers should in no place of their spheres of influence have a common border. Thus neutralized or divided territories such as Persia, Transcaspia, Afghanistan, Xinjiang

²⁾ Such a luxury was subsequently only available during the presence of Soviet occupation forces which was highly appreciated by the Kirghiz leaders and which enabled them to access health facilities in neighbouring Murghab in case of complications. The present leader of the Kirghiz community, Abdur Rashid Khan, has been treated in Murghab hospital several times.

and Tibet had to play the role of buffer zones. In Wakhan we are confronted with the narrowest strip of land separating the spheres of influences in any place. The shape of the Wakhan corridor or Wakhan strip is the vivid proof of colonial boundary-making with all its long-lasting effects and consequences.

To reach this goal former principalities such as Roshan, Shughnan, Gharan, Ishkashim and Wakhan had to be divided into two parts on either side of the Amu Darya. Their respective territories had spread across the Amu Darya river, but the colonial powers had followed the fashion of the time and that was to identify major rivers as “natural” boundaries (cf. maps in KREUTZMANN 1996, 102). Therefore Wakhan was split into what is now Rajon Ishkashim in Tajikistan and Wakhan Woluswali within the Islamic State of Afghanistan. The same fate applies to the other former principalities. They never featured that prominently in world politics as Wakhan did.

Both territories of Wakhan have experienced a most different development since. One could even state that during the “Cold War” this was not only one of the best-controlled frontiers in the world, but that at the same time the socio-economic development gap was probably nowhere on earth wider than here. Within the Soviet Union education and health facilities were externally supported, highly subsidised and reached a very high standard which is nowhere enjoyed in the neighbouring countries, not to mention in Afghanistan. The centralised Soviet economy supplied Rajon Ishkashim with all necessary food stuffs, fuel, coal and consumer goods at nominal cost based on a road infrastructure which was established nearly 70 years ago. The contrast to Wakhan Woluswali could not be bigger! Forgotten and neglected within the planning system of the Afghan ministerial set-up Wakhan Woluswali did not enjoy any facilities such as roads, hospitals, good schools, electricity, telephone lines etc. While mountain farmers in the Soviet system became professionals such as medical doctors, engineers and office workers their Afghan relatives and neighbours had to continue to make a meagre living basically from a subsistence-oriented agriculture (KREUTZMANN 2000a, 2003b).

Since the collapse of the Soviet bloc, all this has changed and the subsequent independence of Tajikistan and other Central Asian Republics was one of its consequences. The living conditions on the right bank of the Amu Darya have substantially deteriorated and the inhabitants on the left bank of the river got on top of their neighbours by displaying their experiences how to run a subsistence-oriented agriculture as they have done for generations in times of severe hardships.

While their neighbours have to go through a process of (re-)learning agricultural practices it is business as usual in Wakhan Woluswali with scope for major improvements.

Boundary-creation in this part of the world had detrimental effects on the exchange relations of the inhabitants of remote mountain valleys such as Wakhan. Kirghiz nomadism was hampered by new barriers and restrictions. M. NAZIF SHAHRANI (1979) coined the term of “closed frontier nomadism” for the practice which has evolved since the hermetic closure of international boundaries. Up to the 1950s Kashgar was their prime trading destination, trade with neighbouring Tajikistan and particularly Murghab had already ceased by 1930 (KREUTZMANN 1996), after the border closures Kabul took its place when once or twice during winter long-distance caravans took off from the Pamirs towards Afghanistan’s capital bazaar.

Wakhi mountain farmers have depended on non-agrarian sources of income like most mountain farmers. Their traditional niches included load-carrying, caravan transport, looting and smuggling, and the supply of food to traders, in addition there was a limited scope for trade by themselves. These extra sources dried immediately up when the “Cold War” began. The historical developments are highlighted here in order to emphasize that there are options for the future when border regimes change, communication lines are opened up, road infrastructure is upgraded and exchange relations can be improved. Then price differentials might be utilized between markets which have not enjoyed any communication for nearly three generations.

Thus the dead-end constellation of Wakhan as it appears on the maps could become advantageous in certain niches and incorporates potential for cross-border activities for the regional uplift and improvement of living conditions of the Wakhi and Kirghiz communities. Their interrelationship continues to exist on a mutual exchange basis: Wakhi provide wheat against the offer of Kirghiz livestock. The exchange value of 12 *ser* (1 *ser* equals app. 7 kg) wheat per one fat-tailed sheep has not significantly changed since several decades (cf. Tab. 4c below).

After 1978 when the Kirghiz community fled into exile in Pakistan of which some families returned and had good relations with the Soviet occupation forces, inhabitants of Wakhan Woluswali mention brief phases of interest in infrastructure development by the Najibullah regime (1986–1992). After that salaries of teachers did not reach and bureaucratic interest faded. The regime of the commanders has replaced the previous state authorities. As there are not only the three

commanders in charge of border security – there are as well in the major settlements sub-commanders of sometimes little-known functions – the local populations realizes that they have more mouths to feed with their contributions than it was experienced during the rule of Afghan administration prior to 1978.

4 Present constellation

Most commanders of today originate from other areas in Badakhshan, mainly from Baharak, Warduj and Zardeu. Only one commander is of local origin: Fateh Ali Shah comes from Qala-e Panja and is presently in charge of the border security in Sarhad-e Wakhan. The commander in Qala-e Panja by the name of Khalil is supposed to come from Warduj, while the commander of Khandut by the name of Qadir Khan originates from Zardeu.

The regime of the commanders is a burden on the local community. After they had taken all the weapons (two machine-guns and twenty Kalashnikov automatic weapons) away from the local people they installed a regime of wheat contributions and livestock delivery which exert heavy dues and imposed taxation on the poor mountain farmers and nomads. In the perception of local residents they overrated their powers, extracted money resources and other valuables, exploited the scanty livelihoods of farmers and shepherds by taking away 200 livestock and about 3,000 kg of wheat flour in 2001. In addition the barter trade in the field of opium against livestock and/or wheat flour is connected with them as well as with external businessmen from Badakhshan and other provinces. Last but not least the levy of toll tax extracted from businessmen and migrant workers has been a valuable source of income for the border commanders, but slows down mobility and exchange at the same time.

Presently this situation seems to change for the benefit of the local residents as the commanders are supposed to draw a provincial salary and are expected to refrain from previous forms of exploitation. To what extent this coincides with reality could not conclusively be established since no salaries were paid in 2003 by the Karzai Government. The aim of local residents is to be confronted with a less exploiting form of local administration and a bureaucracy which concentrates its energies on the improvement of livelihoods and (re-)construction of basic infrastructure. The global influence will be felt when some of the international funds allocated by the recent Bonn conference will reach Wakhan in one way or the other. For inhabitants of Wakhan the dual structure of external rule infers substantial extra costs to date.

4.1 Power relations and social structure

At present the external influence in Wakhan Woluswali is imposed along two lines:

– *Woluswali*: civil administration as represented by the Afghan administrative and bureaucratic set-up, here visible through an acting-Woluswal in the person of Mullah M. Jon in Khandut who claims to be a bureaucrat and a civil judge as well. Very few people showed any esteem for him as a more powerful outside appointment (which is not uncommon) for the post is expected sometime in the future. As basically no noticeable impact by the presence of a Woluswali administration is felt it seems to be a long way back to the former influence which terminated more or less in the 1980s.

– *Commander system*: control institutions through the Badakhshan commander system. During the time of Najmuddin Khan (killed in November 1999) who was in charge of Eastern Badakhshan strict control and regional planning were exercised. The substantial growth of Ishkashim bazaar is due to his planning (as he outlined to us in an interview in October 1999) and had a major impact on the local economy. Within Wakhan the regime of the commanders is felt as a regime of exploitation and heavy taxation without any beneficial impact. Livestock tax, flour tax and toll tax are the areas where dues are extracted. Since the Karzai Government has taken its office and since Sador is in charge of Eastern Badakhshan the exploitative impact is less felt in Wakhan, but the situation is still far from being satisfactory.

The inner structure of the two ethno-linguistic communities in Wakhan is quite different from the externally imposed groups but as well within as their practices and strategies for generating livelihoods and their social and denominational traditions vary:

– *Wakhi community*: within the Wakhi community power structures are related to affiliations of the former social structure. Since the former ruler of Wakhan, Mir Ali Mardan Shah, went into exile in Ishkoman (nowadays Pakistan) in 1883, the ruling family was strong and influential through his younger brothers, Sarbuland Ali Shah and Nasiruddin, who returned to their property in Qala-e Panja after exile (KREUTZMANN 1996, 82). But after their death (around 1936) the former rulers' households (*miri*, *shana*) have lost their previous dominant position, but are to be classified among the bigger and better-off landowners with remote influence in politics.

Stronger influence is exercised by the *saiyid* (or *syed*) families who represent the Ismaili elite of the decentralized *pir* system. It stems from that time when the

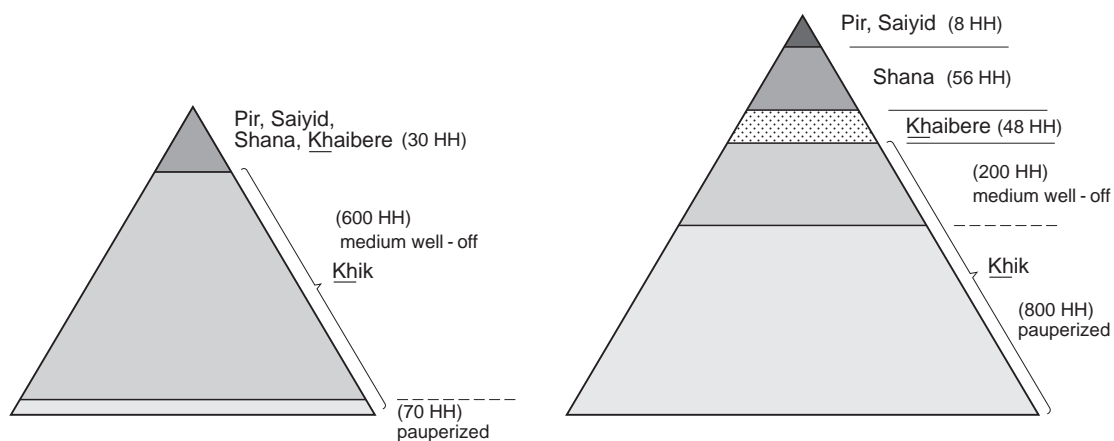
Aga Khan was far away and not regarded as the sole head of the community in daily life affairs. The authoritative position with a regional impact was held by the *pir*. Each household in Wakhan is affiliated with one *pir* or the other and belongs to the followership (*murid*) of one specific *pir*. In Wakhan two *pir* reside. Both families are former refugees from Soviet persecution in Central Asia during the 1920s and 1930s and fled from the right bank of the Amu Darya to the left bank in 1932 (cf. KREUTZMANN 1996, 370) where they had already landholdings and a sizeable followership. The leader of the community is Shah Ismael, *pir* in Qala-e Panja (formerly from Shirgin, Rajon Ishkashim, Gorno Badakhshanskaja Avtonomnaja Oblast (GBAO)). He succeeded his father, Saiyid M. Shah, in 1990. Approximately 450 households (out of 1,100 Ismaili households) are his followers. Senior to him in age and being his uncle is the *pir* of Qazi Deh, Shah-e Langar (formerly of Zung, Rajon Ishkashim, GBAO) with a slightly smaller followership. The remainder of the Ismaili households is affiliated with the *pir* of Zebak (outside Wakhan on the road from Ishkashim towards Shah Silim pass and Chitral). In civil life *pir* and *saiyid* (their relatives) households have been among the better-off and leading families (Fig. 2). Within the remainder of the society there are the village elders (*arbab*) and a group called *khaibere* who enjoyed in the traditional society special rights (e.g. being exempted from load-carrying duties and certain taxes). These elite households are in general more affluent than the remainder of the society if they are not stricken with a domestic opium problem. The ordinary people (*khik*) are more or less equal in political influence but still stratified in social

terms. Of them about one fifth is in a medium position while four fifths are living in very poor conditions. They belong to the majority of pauperized people who during our visit were short of food grains and had to live on dried green plants (*lakh*) which they had predominantly collected in the mountain valleys and which are cooked for consumption as soup.

When M. NAZIF SHAHRANI studied the region in the mid-1970s he observed a social stratification of 25–30 affluent households (including *mini*, *shana*, *saiyid*, *khaibere*), 600 medium well-off households and 70 pauperized households (= 10%; SHAHRANI 1979, 62–64). In our estimate (Fig. 2) the so-called upper class is composed of roughly 110 households, which enjoy a modest living standard, only the *pir* households and a few successful businessmen emerge from this group as wealthy. The remaining one thousand households are split-up in 200 medium well-off and 800 pauperized households³⁾ in the strict sense. The comparison reveals that during more than a quarter century the number and the societal share of the poor have significantly grown.

– *Kirghiz community*: The Kirghiz social set-up is quite different from the Ismaili structure. Although Shah Ismael as the representative of Wakhan in the Loya Jirga takes interest in the Kirghiz affairs and has discussions with Kirghiz leader Abdurrashid Khan from time to time the Sunni nomadic community is differently structured and had its own observer in Kabul.

During the rule and leadership of Haji Rahman Qul the Kirghiz ranged among the most affluent groups of northeastern Afghanistan. Rahman Qul was probably the richest person in the Pamirs and has proved that af-



Source: data for mid-1970s according to Shahrani 1979, data for 2003 according to fieldwork by authors

Design: H. Kreutzmann 2003

Fig. 2: Social structure and the comparison of pauperized groups among Wakhi since mid-1970s and 2003

Sozialstrukturaufbau und der wachsende Anteil Armer in der Wakhi-Bevölkerung seit Mitte der 1970er Jahre und 2003

fluence and remoteness can co-exist. The downfall of the Kirghiz began with their exodus into Pakistan, four years of exile there and the resettlement of the majority in Turkey. The Kirghiz community we are discussing here is the followership of Abdurrashid Khan, about 50 families returned under his leadership to the Afghan Pamirs between 1979 and 1982. In the Great Pamir about 110, in the Little Pamir about 140 households are residing. As there is no landholding and only animal herd size as the measurement of wealth it becomes quite obvious that the clan (seven households) of Abdurrashid Khan with more than 300 animals (62 yaks, 248 sheep and goats) is among the affluent ones, but that the clan (seven households) of Haji Osmon in Wakhjir with 640 animals is stronger as well as the clan (5 households) residing in Birgüt Uya with 450 animals. Other flock sizes in the Little Pamir could be very small such as 21 animals for three households (data according to FOCUS survey, Aug-Sep 1999). Political influence is strongest with Abdurrashid Khan who is said to be quite amicably linked to the security personnel on the northern side of the boundary. In local esteem the Kirghiz in Little Pamir fare better than the Kirghiz of the Great Pamir. The latter are suffering from the remotest location and very limited exchange opportunities (only with Tajikistan) while the Little Pamir is controlling a central position towards Pakistan, China and Tajikistan. The regime of the commanders is detrimentally felt here as well especially in respect to livestock taxes and toll tax for passage and commodities.

4.2 Infrastructure development

A lack of basic amenities is visible everywhere in Wakhan Woluswali and the region could be described as a remote, somehow “forgotten” (as Shah Ismael puts it) valley and a cut-off location in many ways when it comes to the participation in infrastructure development in the past and the present. The detailed report given here is based on interviews in several villages and with experts and might help to understand the intricacies

of being cut-off from social and infrastructure amenities and being incorporated in national and global contexts at the same time.

The infrastructure life-line of Wakhan is the 192 km-long truckable dirt road from Ishkashim through the valley bottom all the way to Sarhad-e Wakhan. There the road terminates and has no connection to any of the Kirghiz communities. The road was constructed in different sections during the Daud regime which is still appreciated by the local inhabitants as the most dedicated to infrastructure development in Wakhan. Four bridges were erected in the 1970s, two with the help of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* (GTZ) close to Qala-e Panja.

The present situation is like this. After FOCUS decided last year to terminate the distribution of humanitarian aid to Wakhi households (which they had begun in 1997) they shifted to a food-for-work programme in road construction in 2003. FOCUS has offered two months of road work this year in which nearly all village communities and all households (i.e. Wakhi people) participated. In the initial part of the road commencing from Ishkashim up to Qazideh via Futur bridges and culverts have been constructed (in a cooperative effort with Afghan Aid). All the rest of the remaining 175 km stretch through the valley needs much more work in bridges and culverts. The food-for-work programme covered basically the easy to be repaired sections of the road while all sections which would be affording engineering participation and higher technical and material input were excluded. As innumerable irrigation channels and ditches cross the road alignment culverts would be the only sensible solution in the long run to avoid constant destruction of water courses.

Major obstacles especially during July–August when glacier melt is at its peak are faced by rivers and rivulets which have to be crossed as bridges are missing or only feasible for donkey transport. A third category of problems is created by swampy sections of the road where groundwater levels are close to the surface and peat bogs and swamps are to be crossed. There would be scope for much more roadwork, but as the teamleader of the FOCUS food-for-work distribution programme, Azmudin, who originates from Faizabad, put it: “The local food deficit has been measured as up to eight months deficiency (survey by FOCUS and Unicef), but donor funds could be attracted only for two months of road construction. We will finish the work soon as the season is short, and the road will not be in a good condition” (Interview Ishkashim, July 25, 2003).

Despite the unsatisfactory manner in which the road work was accomplished, the impact of the improvement of the road is not negligible. The observation

³⁾ Poverty in this context cannot be measured in categories of monetary income. A pauperized household is defined as a living community which is in no position to generate sufficient food for a meagre subsistence by their means of production. All those households are dependent on external food supplies and/or grants from welfare institutions for their survival. Historical reports always mentioned a substantial share of pauperized households to illustrate the general bleak picture of livelihoods in Wakhan (cf. KREUTZMANN 1996). The average household size ranges between 8–11 persons.

that only three vehicles are owned by residents from Wakhan Woluswali disguises the fact that the road improvement has increased exchange between Ishkashim bazaar and Wakhan. Two Russian *Ural* trucks transport mainly the goods of itinerant *saudegar* (businessmen) up the valley who barter goods with local residents against livestock. Although most people have no direct benefit from road construction many interview partners mentioned the road with high priority. This relates to the expectation that extremely high prices are presently fetched by businessmen due to the lack of good accessibility and that basic consumer goods would be available at reasonable prices and sufficient quantities once the road has been improved.

Azmudin of FOCUS mentioned that there are tentative plans of extending the road to the Afghan Pamirs (cf. Fig. 1). This is a priority put forward by the Kirghiz community who sees in the long run more trading potential within Afghanistan and via an Afghan road network than with cross-border traders where the uncontrollable international and bilateral political climate is affecting mutual relations and economic opportunities. Thus decisions taken in Kabul, Islamabad and Dushanbe governs whether borders are open or closed. During our interviews the passes leading into Pakistan were closed due to bilateral political collisions.

The access to the Great Pamir would be via Gazkhan (see Fig. 1) and would cover a distance of 100 km. The connection to the Little Pamir is envisaged from Sarhad-e Wakhan via Langar and Bozai Gumbaz closing a distance of 90 km. Both alignments would traverse very difficult terrain and then connect with truckable tracks which are to be found in the Little Pamir from the times of Soviet occupation and which would connect all the way to the Tajik border at Kizil Robat via Ghundjibhoi. The Great Pamir access would connect to the link at the Tajik border west of Zor Köl lake.

At present no electricity is provided anywhere besides the two or three generators in affluent households. Hydro-electricity could be tapped in many decentralized places, as well as wind or solar energy as a convertible source. It should be mentioned that there are neither post office nor postal and telecommunication services available to the public of Wakhan Woluswali. There is a telephone line managed by the commanders in charge, but reports about its usefulness are quite controversial as is the state of poles and lines which are visible along the road.

4.3 Agriculture

The agro-ecology of Wakhan Woluswali is diverse and can be divided in four zones:

– The lower part of the valley (2,550–2,700 m) enjoys most favourable conditions for cultivation. Here crop farming is the dominant factor of combined mountain agriculture and livestock-keeping is of secondary importance. A few animals are kept, but nobody approaches remote summer pastures, all animals are put on proximity pastures on a daily basis. The cultivars are composed of wheat, barley, beans and peas. Small parcels contain millet (*Panicum miliaceum*), alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*), clover (*Trifolium*) and other leguminous plants. A growing importance can be attributed to kitchen gardens with a selection of vegetables.

– The central part of the valley (2,700–2,900 m) is characterized by a fading importance of beans in the selection of cultivars. Livestock gains in importance and for some better-off households herds can get to sizes which make it feasible to send them to remote summer grazing grounds in the Great Pamir where Wakhi villages have traditional grazing rights (cf. Fig. 1).

– The upper part (mainly villages located in the Ab-e Wakhan valley, 2,900–3,600 m) features only wheat, barley, peas and *Lathyrus sativus* (*krosh*) as bread crops, no bean cultivation anymore. Animal husbandry becomes more important and herd sizes in general, but especially of the better-off people increase substantially.

– The Great and Little Pamir (above 3,500 m) are devoid of any cultivation, only in Langar some fields have been developed. Generally these are the grazing grounds of the Kirghiz nomads, although the western part of the Pamir-e Kalan is reserved for summer grazing by Wakhi shepherds (cf. Fig. 1). There are no disputes about pastures in this part. In contrast, here is still ample scope for bigger herds as pastures fed many more animals during the 1970s.

Besides this stratification based on orography, agricultural practices and traditions there is in all zones a wide variation in land-holdings and herd sizes. The most affluent household of Qala-e Panja easily outnumbered the poorest farmer by a factor of 30 when it comes to landholding and herds. There are quite a number of households without any livestock or the occasional cow for daily milk consumption.

The same applies for animal herds among Kirghiz. In the Great Pamir (*Chong Pamir*) the ownership of sheep varies between 28 and 120, while in the Little Pamir household ownership could be as low as 1–2 sheep, and as high as 70–75 per yurt (according to FOCUS livestock census 1999). The assessment of crop-farming and livestock-breeding has to keep this variability in mind. As stated above the number of

households at the lower end of the social scale is high and increasing, the mass of the population is trying to survive at the margin. Any crisis or unexpected event can lead to disastrous livelihood conditions.

4.3.1 Crop-farming

Where crop-farming is the dominant activity coping strategies in times of need are centred around the collection of *green plant (lakh)*, a wild spinach-like plant which is collected in the mountain valleys, dried and eaten in a watery soup. The gathering of this naturally available plant is a strong indicator for deficient grain-production and the failure of other sources of income. The length of the “green plant” eating period – which causes quite severe weakness and fatigue – as neither protein, oil and salt are available shows how big the production deficit is. We were told that these periods could be as long as four months for certain households.

An important crop for the poor is *Lathyrus sativus (krosh)* which when consumed in too high quantities causes lathyrism, well known in other parts of the world as well. Paralytic symptoms occur and could finally lead to death. In Wakhan the palsy appearance is popularly called “polio” as many people appear to have lost full control of leg and arm movements and their sense of equilibrium is fading. The *krosh* crop is appreciated by the poor not only because of good yield even on poor soil, but as well as it is the early ripening crop in summer-autumn and its harvest concludes the summer starvation period. The occurrence of lathyrism is a strong indicator for the present risky living conditions, a smaller dosage of *krosh* in the daily diet would be less detrimental for health.

Seed selection and/or rotation is not part of tradition. With improved wheat varieties and faster growing barley varieties yield could be increased and harvests could be available earlier. Presently the farmers basically produce their own seed and are always challenged by the option to keep seed or to eat it. This conflict has been addressed through NGOs (FOCUS and now Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN)) by distributing wheat packages and by the operation of wheat and grain stores in the villages where on an interest-free basis wheat (and mineral fertilizer) loans can be acquired within certain margins. The loan has to be returned after harvest. The same system of wheat loans is part of the tradition – not only in Wakhan, but in neighbouring valleys as well. The religious taxes (*zakat*) are collected in kind and stored in the villages. In times of shortage the religious leaders give wheat to the needy as a gift or on loan basis. This storage system could be identified as

a local coping strategy to share and reduce risk and to avoid social unrest in the local communities.

When NGOs have offered mineral fertilizer farmers readily accepted the offer and confirmed that yields increased significantly. No farmer admitted that he ever had purchased fertilizer on his own account in a bazaar. In Wakhan landholdings in general are too small for fallowing with the exception of the leading families who can afford that practice. During our interviews we were surprised how little efforts had been undertaken in the recent past in respect of bringing new land under cultivation. The construction of irrigation channels, the improvement of sedimentation tanks to filter the suspended matter from “glacier milk” (without any nutritional and soil-improvement value) and the development of new village lands are prime targets for the future improvement of the physical agricultural infrastructure.

4.3.2 Livestock-keeping

The aspect of herd sizes and the varying appreciation and importance of livestock for the agricultural practices have been mentioned above. Here the same applies like in other communities (cf. EHLERS a. KREUTZMANN 2000):

- Bovines are mainly kept for domestic purposes. In Wakhi and Kirghiz households cows and yaks are kept for milk production and its immediate consumption as part of their basic diet of salted milk tea and bread. In cases of surplus all components of the milk are processed into yoghurt, butter and qurut (protein-rich cake from boiled-down and dehydrated butter milk).

- Ovines are bred for the markets. The valuable exchange commodity of fat-tailed sheep appears to be the prime currency in barter trade. While Wakhi farmers exchange the occasional sheep and the more affluent up to five, the Kirghiz tend to market more animals as they rely on the exchange value of their livestock for their wheat flour needs in total.

Livestock-keeping and animal breeding are risk-prone undertakings. If successful the return rate of profits is higher than in crop farming, but the risk of failure due to disasters and diseases is higher. The latter happened to the breeders in the spring of 2003 when late snowfalls caused heavy losses in livestock. In addition in some villages such as Qala-e Panja animal diseases (including foot-and-mouth-disease) reduced the herd sizes to nearly half. The villages with a reputation of prevalent animal diseases are not accepted with their herds in summer pastures and grazing grounds which they share with others. No veterinary service has been approachable for them.

In some villages the provision of winter fodder is a scarcity factor for livestock-keeping. The prolonged cold season affords substantial stocks of green fodder and straw. Some villages do not bring back their livestock in winter, they keep it either in the Great Pamir pastures (cf. Fig. 1) such as Djilmasirt where normally less snowfall occurs than in the permanent settlements or they give their livestock to the custody of Kirghiz nomads for the cold season which costs a fee. Only a few households with significant herds follow these practices. There are quite a number of Wakhi households with no livestock at all.

4.4 Education and health

The assessment of the educational status and the extent of accessible health facilities is characterized by the observation that even where there are facilities the quality is extremely poor. Although the first primary school of Wakhan was established in Qala-e Panja nearly half a century ago the quality and effect of education is appalling.

There are 13 schools (Tab. 1) which basically do not deserve that physical description. The buildings are empty and naked mural structures without doors, windows and glass panes. Furniture is not existing, rarely a black board is available and/or a wooden log for sitting arrangements. The assessment of this deficit was overcome by Unicef in providing tents as classroom replacements to several villages. A single tent costs US \$ 600. In most cases at least three or four of these tents were provided. For the sum spent on tents longer-lasting buildings could have been constructed by the village communities thus creating a few paid jobs to the local craftsmen. Residents rate education as high on their

Table 1: Schools in Wakhan

Schulen in Wakhan		
Primary school	Secondary school	High school (up to class 12)
Wark	Futur	Qazideh
Urgund (recently upgraded to sec.)	Pigash	Khandut
Sast	Qala-e Panja	
Shkaur	Babatangi	
Deh Ghulaman	Sarhad-e Wakhan	
Rawchun		

Source: own survey in July 2003

Table 2: Class attendance and gender distribution in Qala-e Panja secondary school

Klassengrößen und Verteilung von Schülerinnen und Schülern in der Sekundarschule in Qala-e Panja

Class	Boys	Girls	Percentage of girls
1	18	11	37.9
2	13	14	51.8
3	17	11	39.3
4	15	6	28.6
5	10	5	33.3
6	8	3	27.2
7	11	4	26.6
8	12	1	7.7
9	12	0	0

Source: data provided by headmaster Aminuddin, July 2003

priority list and send their children on daily sojourns to school which could last up to three hours per way. In winter schools are closed for three months. The attendance was fairly good during our unannounced visit. The high attendance might be contributed to the fact that during the last two months daily a ration of tetra milk packs was issued to the students and teachers (sponsored by Aga Khan Foundation and the US Department of Agriculture).

The attributed high priority to education is difficult to be comprehended. Generally girls are sent to school for basic instruction up to class 6 (Tab. 2). In higher classes the participation of girls is fading. Nobody could name us a girl which had finished high school in Wakhan yet. The only persons who go through the whole system are some boys. If they manage to attend school up to the final class they are predestined for becoming local teachers in their villages. All teachers in Qala-e Panja secondary school qualified either from Khandut or Ishkashim high school. None of them had received further education not to mention teacher's training. Last year was the first year since many that teachers received a salary of 1,500 Afghani per month. Since December 2002 no salaries have been paid to teachers and other government employees. The teachers claim that they still survive on savings from last year's payments and their afternoon engagement in agriculture. In all of Wakhan we heard of two female teachers, one seems to be an experienced person who is teaching for a long time. The second female teacher originates from Pakistan and married a Wakhi migrant worker before settling with her spouse in Wakhan. She got eight years of schooling in the Chupursan valley in Hunza, sufficient to become a teacher here. The em-

phasis parents put on education might relate to the observations of migrant workers in Pakistan where the standard of education (at least in the Ismaili communities) is much higher and has enabled the people to generate a comparatively better living standard. A recent survey in the central and upper settlements of Wakhan revealed: Adult literacy is 14% for men, 3% for women. 60% of the 7–14 year-old boys and 22% of the 7–14 year-old girls surveyed are attending school (DUNCAN a. DUNCAN 2002, 3).

Again we could not find a single student who continued education after leaving high school and who built a professional career through further studies. The observation reflects the poor quality of teaching. No school books are available, in Qala-e Panja. The headmaster Aminuddin stated that out of the 67 households (app. 600 persons) in Qala-e Panja only 5 to 6 families can afford to purchase school books. Some classes⁴⁾ are taught with only one book in the hand of the teacher. Besides providing school tents Unicef engaged in the distribution of teaching materials as well. To improve the quality of teaching it is required that buildings receive a facelift, teachers are trained, not only within the subjects which is more than necessary, but as well in methods of teaching.

Although the teachers are mainly from the own community complaints about their social behaviour could not be overheard. There seem to be a number of teachers involved in opium (*teryak*) consumption, if not in distribution and trafficking. This accusation was stated in a written complaint with the newly appointed governor of Badakhshan in Faizabad.

Health infrastructure is lacking to a great extent. There is no permanent health clinic or a co-ordinated community health programme in Wakhan. Presently two clinics are under construction in Ishkashim and in Khandut. AKDN plans to establish them as focal points for the provision of access to health facilities. At present none is operating. In addition, there is a clinic in Ishkashim jointly operated by Médecins sans frontières (MSF) and the Ministry of Public Health in Ishkashim. Here general practice is available and ten beds are available for in-patients, not exclusively reserved for patients from Wakhan, but as well for ailing people from Ishkashim, Zebak and Gharan. In August-September 2003 MSF is opening a TB clinic in Ishkashim. It is expected that 120 TB cases are to be registered in Badakhshan. In order to avoid the spreading of tuber-

⁴⁾ Subjects taught include: Dari, Pashto, Arabic, English, Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Geography, Ethics, Holy Quran, Hadith, History, and Physical Education.

colosis a thorough therapy under strict control is aimed at. In June 1999, a medical doctor and a nurse from MSF visited Wakhan and reported about a 46% malnutrition among children. In August 2002, MSF started to train four workers to run 'health posts' in four locations between Qala-e Panja and Qazi Deh in a measure to provide the very basics in locations which can be accessed under a two-day journey.

The Pesawar-based NGO Orphans, Refugees and Aid International (ORA) was operating two opium-addicts rehabilitation centres⁵⁾ from 1998–2001 in Qazi Deh and Khandut with mixed success which finally led to the closure due to the lack of previously provided EU funds. Nevertheless, ORA is back in Wakhan with a project in health training. The programme is based on a survey (data basis is one in three households interviewed, DUNCAN a. DUNCAN 2002) which highlighted the poor state of health and lack of facilities. The crude mortality rate of 41 per 1,000 population per year (67% of these deaths are children under 5 years of age) is higher than Afghanistan's average which in itself is among the highest in Asia. The difficult situation for children is reflected in the figure of 314 per 100,000 for the mortality rate under 5 years. Poor state of hygiene, lacking access to medical check-ups and professional treatment are the general features to be addressed here:

- Main causes of death in children under 5 are unexplained neonatal death, respiratory illness, measles and abdominal causes.
- 25% of 2 year olds and 50 % of 1 year olds are malnourished.
- Vaccination coverage is around 75% for measles and polio, but only 35% for DTP and BCG.
- 49% of women of child-bearing age have had no tetanus toxoid vaccination and only 18% have had 3 doses (DUNCAN a. DUNCAN 2002, 3).

The ORA approach seems to be a sensible approach to mitigate the severe shortcomings in child care by training local women in the field of traditional birth attendance, hygiene and child feeding. It will be a long way to go for Wakhan to have any kind of access to medical facilities, especially in cases of emergency.

⁵⁾ These so-called Najat clinics were not only operated in Wakhan, but as well in other border districts such as Shughnan, Zebak and Ishkashim with a high drug addiction problem. Opium (*teryak*) was traditionally the only medical drug available and functioned as an appetite suppressant at the same time. Therefore in times of tension and supply shortages opium consume has increased as well in the Wakhi as in the Kirghiz areas. In the mid-1970s SHAHRANI (1979, 138) estimated that about one hundred persons were consuming opium regularly. This number is now significantly higher.

4.5 Regional mobility

Outmigration is a well-known coping strategy not only in mountain regions but very common and part of the tradition in the Hindukush, Karakoram and Pamirs. In the Wakhan context our interview partners confirmed that outmigration in times of little or less agricultural work was quite common especially during winter and spring. There are two target regions of particular interest for migrants:

– During the period of internal insecurity within Afghanistan when it was not safe to travel on domestic roads a number of males sought an outlet by taking-up employment in Pakistan, in particular in the Ismaili settlements of Chitral, Gilgit and Hunza. In contrast to seasonal migration into neighbouring Chitral the journey to Gilgit and Hunza afforded an investment which would only be feasible for longer periods. We interviewed some Wakhi who had spent between one to three years there. The climax of this migration seems to be over due to a number of reasons. First of all, wages are not particularly high in Pakistan and it is a measure of dire needs to go there for prolonged stints of work. Second, the Pakistan authorities have made it more difficult for Afghan citizens to stay in Pakistani villages since 9/11 when village searches were executed in order to send illegal migrants back to Afghanistan. Third, at present the political relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan are strained with the effect that the two major passes connecting the region with Chitral – Shah Silim connecting Zebak with the Lutkoh valley, and Baroghil between Sarhad-e Wakhan and the Yarkhun Valley – are closed for migrants and exchange. Although crossing is presently not impossible the cost of travelling increases under those circumstances and the poor are the first who cannot afford such an investment. Nevertheless, our interview partners reported about a number of males in Pakistan at present of whom they have no news at all. These migrants are just relieving the household from an additional eater, but are normally not in a position to save anything from their wages and/or to send remittances of any kind to support their families in Wakhan.

– Since the last two years major changes have occurred. More people have left Wakhan for other areas in Badakhshan such as Baharak and Faizabad, and even for Tarkhar and Qunduz to seek low-paid employment in Afghanistan as load-carriers, labourers in road construction and as helpers in bazaars. The same applies here that basically no savings can be accumulated from those wages and that not much communication takes place between migrants and their family members.

Outmigration in general could be reduced further by more work opportunities locally. The presently executed food-for-work programme along the Wakhan road has proved the severe need for non-agrarian income to cope with the production deficits from agriculture.

4.6 Non-agrarian income generation through wages and salaries

Within the valley there does not exist a cash economy for hiring wage labourers. Most of the business is executed in a barter system. The village specialists such as masons, carpenters, blacksmiths, weavers, supervisors of irrigation channels (*mirab*) and owners of water-mills (*khedorg*) are remunerated once a year by the concerned households for which they offer their services through a small quantity of grain, or in the case of several days of continuous work through food provided during their working period plus a certain quantity of wheat for the work (Tab. 3).

The group which is eligible to draw a salary was called by sociologist Hamza Alavi the “salarariat” and could be one of the very influential in local politics and being a role model for commitment to education (ALAVI 1989). In Wakhan the government officials including the Woluswal and his assistant belong to this group. The biggest group is comprised of teachers and conscribed soldiers and militiamen. All have in common that no salary of any kind was paid to them in 2003 up to today. Some of our interview partners claimed that they still have some savings from last year’s payment which was one of the first in so many years and which established some trust in the Karzai Government. People were reminded of Najibullah’s rule, the last time of regular salaries in this remote part of Afghanistan.

4.7 Exchange economy and entrepreneurship

Despite the fact that basically there is no cash economy in Wakhan money as a unit of calculation and fixing barter values plays a major role and the new “Karzai money” is the unit of calculation in Afghani. Prices differ quite substantially from location to location. Transport of goods from the bazaars in Kabul, Jalalabad, Qunduz and Taloqan permit their investors some substantial gain. Improved road conditions from the major urban centres to Faizabad and Baharak and onwards to Ishkashim have lowered transport costs and increased the frequency of vehicle arrivals in Ishkashim. While four years ago the bazaar of Ishkashim was very small with less than 50 shops of which only a few were open, the bazaar infrastructure has changed and the bazaar has grown to more than 300

shops which mainly have been constructed during the last two years and attracted local vendors and a few affluent and potent businessmen from Baharak and Faizabad. The latter are the two major supply centres for Ishkashim and consequently for Wakhan.

It is difficult to establish how many vehicles are arriving in Ishkashim on a daily basis as seasonality is of importance. During our last stay about five vehicles – mini busses, pick-ups and/or trucks – arrived in Ishkashim per day. According to the Ishkashim Woluswal, Syed Imran Khan, the cost of transporting goods was previously about 40–45 Afghani/*ser* and has nowadays come down to 10 Afghani/*ser* for goods from Baharak and 15 Afghani/*ser* from Faizabad. A further 30 Afghani/*ser* could be required to bring goods to the end of the Wakhan road to Sarhad-e Wakhan (about 20 Afghani to Qala-e Panja).

A big rush of vehicles occurs when the businessmen (*saudegars*) arrive in spring to give goods on loan to the villagers in Wakhan Woluswali. They are meant to pay back their dues in autumn through wheat and livestock at higher costs (Tab. 4a). The middle column gives the prices which are charged for purchases on credit in Ishkashim bazaar.

The further businessmen proceed up the valley and visit the houses of their customers the higher the prices grow. The lack of transport – from the central valley it is a five day donkey trip to Ishkashim bazaar –, the lack of price worthy shops within Wakhan – only a few so-called household shops exist in Qazi Deh with very small profit margins, and a small bazaar run by external businessmen with high prices operates in Khandut – force the Wakhi and Kirghiz to appreciate the services of the itinerant businessmen who come to their villages. The customers know that they pay overrated

prices, but there seems to be no option, at least for the poor. A few households use their camels for the transport of bulky goods such as wheat flour all the way to Yamit, Pigash, Kurut and even to Sarhad-e Wakhan (cf. Fig. 1). But they use these means for their personal needs alone. No cooperative effort has been started to encourage farmers to pool their purchases in Ishkashim bazaar and to gain higher profits from their agricultural products that way by paying lower prices for the goods bartered. There is scope for much improvement in this field which seems to be more advantageous to the *saudegars* than to the farmer and animal husbander (Tab. 4b).

Traditionally the Wakhi had more exchange with their Kirghiz neighbours and shared the business of bartering grain for animal products (Tab. 4c). But even at those times the local population was quite dependent on itinerant traders from Badakhshan and elsewhere for the purchase of clothes, tea and other consumer goods (Fig. 3). The present situation is characterized by production deficits in all fields: crop production and livestock-breeding. Consequently the high prices of external businessmen have an even more detrimental effect on the local economy and deprive the poor of their last resources. Therefore quite a number of households cannot afford to eat bread for several months and has to depend on the collection of any kind of “green plants” (*lakh*) mainly from the mountains until the next harvest is brought in. In July more than a quarter of the households had run out of grain stocks already while the next harvest was still two months away. To alleviate this constrained situation the food-for-work programme of FOCUS (as mentioned above) was more than welcome in times of hardship.

On the other side of the social scale we find three successful businessmen from Wakhan who have man-

Table 3: Village specialists and their remuneration

Professionelle Dorfspezialisten und ihre Entlohnung

Profession	Remuneration
Irrigation channel supervisor	Once a year 1 <i>ser</i> of wheat from the participating households
Water-mill owner	From every bag of wheat he receives one small shovel of wheat flour
Blacksmith	Who is in need of the service of the blacksmith will provide the material (scrap iron etc.) for the required tool, other households provide the charcoal; all households provide the blacksmith for his services with 1 <i>ser</i> of wheat after harvest
Mason and carpenter	All material provided by the customer; food served by him during the days of labour, plus a small remuneration for the work
Weaver of coarse carpets (<i>palos</i>)	Material provided by the customer, as well as food for about four to five days of work, plus a remuneration of 1 <i>ser</i> of wheat per day
<i>Khalifa</i> (Ismaili clergyman)	According to services provided during rites of passage different remunerations apply

Source: own survey in July 2003

aged to learn from the external *saudegar* how to make profits. Muminbhoy from Tapc (near Babtangi) and Ramazonbhoy from Pigash have made a substantial wealth from big herds of livestock. They sell regularly about 200 and more animals per year. Both have suc-

ceeded in combining their livestock production and sale with the purchase of goods in favourable markets (a third person – Buribhoy from Yamit – does this on a smaller scale). Thus they purchase sheep from local farmers and Kirghiz nomads and drive them down the

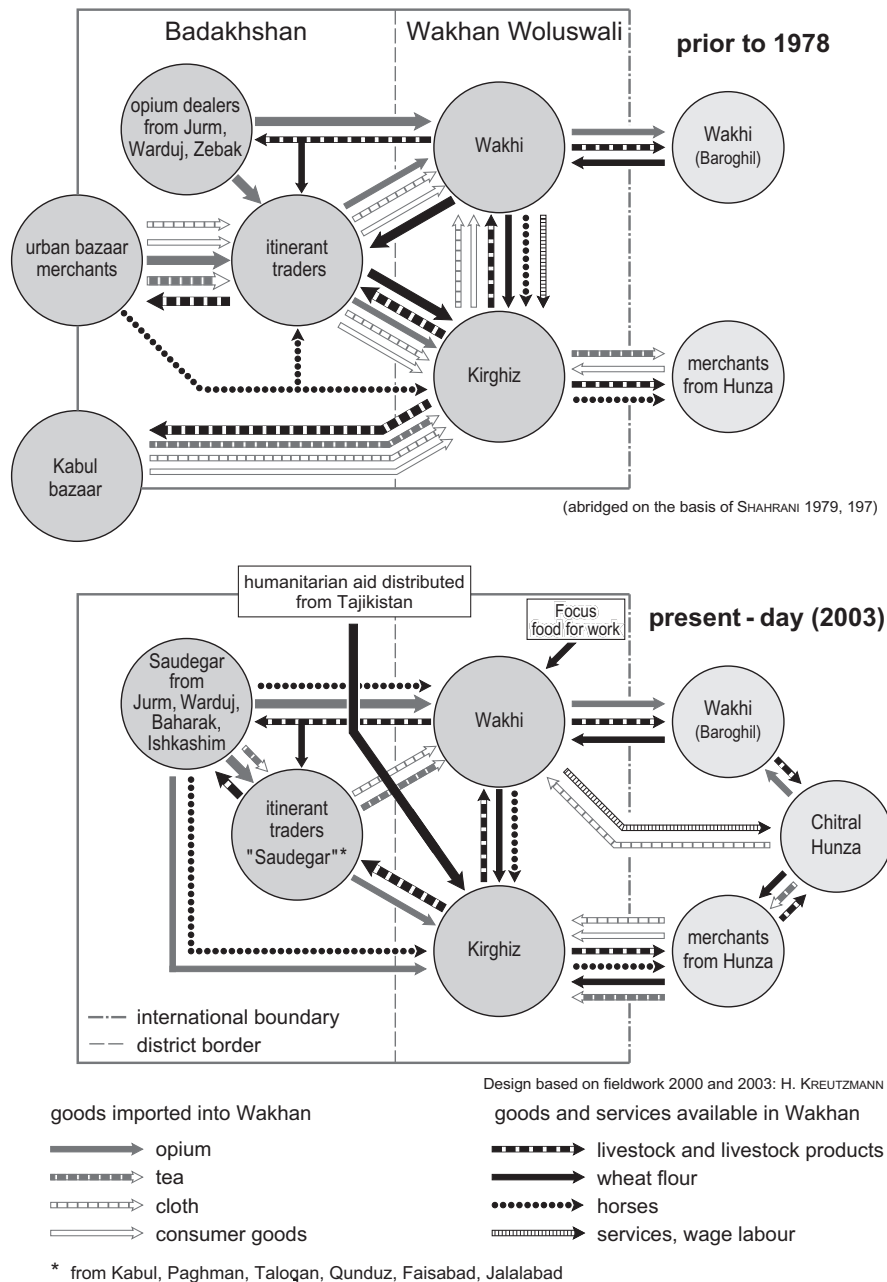


Fig. 3: Comparison of exchange relations among Wakhi and Kirghiz and with outsiders: pre-1978 and 2003

Vergleich der Austauschbeziehungen von Wakhi und Kirgisen untereinander und mit auswärtigen Geschäftsleuten: vor 1978 und 2003

Table 4a: Comparison of prices (in Afghani) for basic goods between Ishkashim Bazaar vendors and itinerant traders in Wakhan

Vergleich der Preise (in Afghani) für Grundgüter zwischen dem Bazar in Ishkashim und ambulanten Händlern in Wakhan

Commodity	Ishkashim Bazaar (cash purchase)	Ishkashim Bazaar (on credit)	Purchase from itinerant traders in Wakhan
1 kg of black tea (<i>sir choy</i>)	80–90	100	150
1 kg of vegetable oil (<i>tel</i>)	45–50	50	100
1 tin of “American oil” (2.7 kg)	200	250	
1 <i>ser</i> of wheat	40–60 (seasonal)	50–70 (seasonal)	200
1 <i>ser</i> of salt (<i>namak</i>)	20–25	30	120
1 <i>ser</i> of rice (<i>bras</i>)	150–160	170–200	300
1 kg of beans	25		
1 piece of soap (<i>zabun</i>)	7	10	20
1 matchbox	2	2	5

Note: Here we enquired only about goods which are purchased and consumed in Wakhan, sugar and cigarettes, onions, vegetables and fruit, and other items are available in Ishkashim, but are generally not purchased by customers from Wakhan. 1 *ser* equals app. 7 kg

Source: own interviews in July 2003

valley to the urban centres. Both have succeeded within the last year to purchase a Russian *Ural* truck to participate in the business of bringing *saudegar* and their goods up the valley, provide transport to local people and to construction projects. They have proved that more of the profits in the exchange and barter economy could be realized within the Wakhan community.

4.8 Tourism and trophy-hunting

“Modern” forms of income-generating in remote mountain regions are often linked to service industries in case the mountains are of any attraction to visitors. This is very much the case in Wakhan and the Afghan Pamirs. In this field the region has gained some experiences when mountaineering expeditions visited Wakhan in the 1960s and 1970s. For the villages of Qazi Deh, Wark, Keshnikan, Ptukh and a few others portering and support services became a seasonal source of income. This source dried up in the late 1970s and only in 2003 the first mountaineering expedition (since 28 years) visited Qazi Deh. The impact of this source of income is not really felt and the expectations of the local leaders are not very high towards tourism in general.

Trophy-hunting was well-known in Wakhan due to the seasonal operation of King Zahir Shah’s hunting camp in the Great Pamir (Pamir-e Kalan). The location for the regal hunting lodge was the Tolibai valley where King Zahir Shah had hunted a major Marco Polo ram in the late 1950s. Only in 1968 permission was granted for the first overseas safari tours operator to hunt wild sheep in the valley (PETOCZ 1973, 25; PETOCZ et

al. 1978, 1). As early as in 1973 four valleys of the Great Pamir were identified as game reserves: Sargaz, Tulibai, Manjulak and Abakhan (PETOCZ 1973). These valleys were taken away as grazing grounds from the local Wakhi shepherds and reserved for trophy-hunting organized through Afghantour. For Wakhi jobs as overseers of grazing and hunting restrictions were provided. Additional small measures could not cover the loss of grazing grounds to the Wakhi shepherds and the imposition of restrictions created a constant source of dispute.

Due to some opposition from the Kirghiz leader Rahman Qul trophy-hunting was not brought into the Kirghiz grazing grounds in the Great and Little Pamir. Tourism planning aimed at introducing trekking and wildlife viewing. Those were the activities and plans of the 1970s. Since then a major break-down of all tourism activities has occurred and no infrastructure is left. Nevertheless, given the attraction of Wakhan and the Afghan Pamirs to European travellers tourism in appropriate forms could be rejuvenated. The constraints and the potential conflicts between pasture utilization for domestic stock and wild animals needs thoughtful consideration. Any kind of additional source of cash income with all its fringe benefits to drivers, porters, and other staff could help to uplift this region.

5 Wakhan Woluswali – an arena of severe constraints

The above observations and reflections are applicable to the whole of Wakhan Woluswali in its two major

Table 4b: Purchase of agricultural commodities in exchange with bazaar goods by Ishkashim vendors and itinerant businessmen from Wakhi and Kirghiz (in Afghani and wheat units)

Erwerb landwirtschaftlicher Güter von Wakhi und Kirgisen im Austausch mit Bazarwaren, die von Ladenbesitzern in Ishkashim und ambulanten Geschäftsleuten angeboten werden (in Afghani und Weizeneinheiten)

Commodity	Ishkashim Bazaar (cash purchase)	Ishkashim Bazaar (sale of the same by the shopkeepers)	Barter with itinerant traders in Wakhan
1 <i>ser</i> of wheat	45–50		
1 fat-tailed sheep	2000–2500	2500–3000	10–15 <i>ser</i> wheat
1 medium-sized sheep or goat	1500	1700–1800	10 <i>ser</i> wheat
1 yak (one-year-old)			10–15 <i>ser</i> wheat
1 yak (5 to 6 years)			60 <i>ser</i> wheat
1 cow			20–25 <i>ser</i> wheat
1 ox			20–40 <i>ser</i> wheat
1 horse-cover (<i>jhül</i>)	1000–2000		
1 <i>ser</i> qurut	4–5 <i>ser</i> wheat or up to 400 Afghani	500	
1 <i>ser</i> butter (<i>rughun</i>)	12 <i>ser</i> wheat or up to 800 Afghani	1000	
1 coarse carpet (<i>palos</i>)	1100–1200	1500	

1 *ser* equals app. 7 kg

Source: own interviews in July 2003

sections, i.e., the Wakhi villages with their system of combined mountain agriculture, their limited cash flow and entrepreneurship on the one hand, and the Kirghiz nomads with their system of mountain-related mobile animal husbandry on the other. Any development effort has to take into consideration these two basic strategies of utilizing and exploiting the natural potential of the region. Because of poor other skills,

poor education standards and professional training emphasis needs to be put on the significant uplift of grain and livestock production to cover basic needs on a subsistence level but to provide at the same time market products for necessary bartering (cf. Fig. 3).

Nobody of the interviewees obviously had any knowledge about attempts to exploit other natural resources such as minerals, semi-precious and precious



Photo 1: Irrigated oases in the upper Wakhan Valley: cultivated fields and habitations of Wakhi
(Photo: H. KREUTZMANN 22.07.2003)

Bewässerungsoasen im oberen Wakhan-Tal: landwirtschaftlich genutzte Felder und Siedlungen der Wakhi

Table 4c: Exchange of commodities between Wakhi and itinerant businessmen and between Wakhi and Kirghiz (in wheat units)

Tausch von Waren zwischen Wakhi und ambulanten Händlern sowie zwischen Wakhi und Kirgisen (in Weizeneinheiten)

Commodity	Exchange between Wakhi and Kirghiz	Barter with itinerant traders in Wakhan
1 fat-tailed sheep	12 <i>ser</i> wheat	10–15 <i>ser</i> wheat
1 medium-sized sheep or goat		10 <i>ser</i> wheat
1 yak (one-year-old)		10–15 <i>ser</i> wheat
1 yak (5 to 6 years)		60 <i>ser</i> wheat
1 cow		20–25 <i>ser</i> wheat
1 ox		20–40 <i>ser</i> wheat
1 horse-cover (<i>jhül</i>)	15–80 <i>ser</i> wheat	
1 <i>ser</i> qurut	4 <i>ser</i> wheat	
1 <i>ser</i> butter (<i>rughun</i>)	8–12 <i>ser</i> wheat	

1 *ser* equals app. 7 kg

Source: own interviews in July 2003



Photo 2: Kara Jilga (4,200 m) in the Little Pamir. Summer camp of the household of Abdur Rashid Khan, head of the Kirghiz community

(Photo: H. KREUTZMANN 11.06.2000)

Kara Jilga (4.200 m) im Kleinen Pamir. Sommerlager des Haushaltes von Abdur Rashid Khan, Oberhaupt der kirgisischen Gemeinschaft

stones. This was surprising as the world-renowned *Lapis lazuli* mine of Sar-e Sang (Kokcha), the spinell (*lal-e badakhshan*) mines of Gharan, the gold dust washing on the banks of glacier-melt water-fed rivers and potential marble quarries of Langar are not that far away.

In general, the impoverished groups have grown significantly in the last quarter century, more than three quarters of the society belong to vulnerable groups due to the size of their landholdings, livestock herds (if there is livestock at all) and household circumstances. Special vulnerable groups are widows with no grown-up male workforce in their households. Although a system of neighbourhood support services (*keriyar*) exists many people cannot afford to participate because of lack of own household resources. Another group of vulnerable people includes those households where the workforce is diminished by suffering from lathyrism (due to *krosh* consumption) and other diseases. A third group to be distinguished is that one which consists of those households where major assets were lost due to opium (*teryak*) consumption of one or more household members. This phenomenon applies especially to Kirghiz households where during the last quarter century opium consumption has substantially increased.

The situation in the Kirghiz areas of the Great and Little Pamir (cf. Fig. 1) has some special features which need to be addressed here when strategies for poverty alleviation are in focus. There is no school, no shop, no health worker, not a single trained veterinary specialist in the Kirghiz areas at present. The Kirghiz are totally dependent on the supply of bread flour from outside as they do not practice crop farming. At those high altitudes (above 3,500 m, mainly above 4,000 m) there would be not much potential for grain crop cultivation either.

This situation which looks bleak is reflected in the discussions about the resettlement in Kyrgyzstan which were prominent in 2000 during our visit with Abdurashid Khan. This option has now been ruled out and is no option anymore because of different reasons, the strongest might be the fading to non-existing interest of the Kyrgyzstan government at present and probably in future as well to attract any settlers. But there are some local reasons too, including those of giving up valuable pastures for good, loss of certain degrees of freedom and some sense of belonging to Afghanistan although residing in the remotest corner.

In former times the Kirghiz showed a strong link to the King's court and the bazaar of Kabul (cf. Fig. 3) where they did the marketing of their livestock and related products. The herd size was significant and the business brought quite some cash to Wakhan. They earned that much from this market that even some Wakhi households found seasonal and permanent employment in the Kirghiz grazing grounds (cf. SHAHRANI 1979). With this they have proved that their economic approach is feasible and valuable. How to improve this situation nowadays? In the mid-1970s Kirghiz nomads of the Little and Great Pamirs owned 38,600 sheep and goats, 3,544 yaks, 318 horses, and 83 camels (SHAHRANI 1979, 177). In comparison, a quarter century later the total number is much less (Tab. 5). One could argue that this proves only that the carrying capacity of the Pamirs is not fully utilized. But when we compare 333 households comprising a population of 1,825 persons living there in the mid-1970s with the population in 1999 of 237 households and 1,264 persons (in 2003 approximately 250 households), then we can calculate that in equal terms there should be about two thirds of the animals. But our comparison (Tab. 5) significantly shows that horses and camels are there in adequate numbers as they are undisposable of because of transport requirements, but the number of sheep and goats is only one third of what it should be and the number of yaks just two thirds when compared with previous

times. This is strong proof for our observation that market relations have been severed and constrained – thus sheep and goats as the prime market product are there only in small numbers – but the domestic wealth shows shortcomings as well because the size of yak herds – they are predominantly bred for home consumption and utilization (milk, meat, dung, hair, tails) – has significantly diminished. We can conclude that the Kirghiz in the Afghan Pamirs are worse off than previously and that there is scope for improving their livelihoods. Their opportunities of market participation have been severely affected by internal and external political developments. Nomads of the remote corner of Afghanistan are suffering from the societal fragmentation and hampered exchange relations.

Since 1997 there have been some experiments of organizing trade fairs between Kirghiz from Murghab (Pamirski Post) District in Tajikistan and Afghan Kirghiz. A trade fair took place in Ghundjibhoi in the border area between the Little Pamir and Kizil Robot for a few hours on 24th September 2003. Among the 70–80 Kirghiz from each side goods were exchanged: wheat flour, household goods, clothes and diesel from Tajikistan (all goods are taxed by the district authorities) against live animals (fat-tailed sheep) from Afghanistan (information supplied by Erik Engel, Murghab). The Kirghiz from there are renown for their good trading skills by their neighbours from Tajikistan. Similar trade fairs have taken place west of Lake Zor Köl between Alichur Pamir and the Great Pamir of Afghanistan. We could not establish why these trade fairs ceased to exist although there is much more need for exchange in this most remote part of the Pamirs. Trade fairs could also help in the exchange of experiences in livestock breeding as many of the privatised animal husbanders of Murghab District are still in the process of (re-)learning the practices of their grandfathers from the time before collectivization.

The enhanced exchange between Murghab District and the Afghan Pamirs has certain advantages beyond

Table 5: Comparison of herd sizes among the Kirghiz in mid-1970s and 1999 in the Afghan Pamirs

Vergleich der kirgisischen Herdengrößen Mitte der 1970er Jahre und 1999 im afghanischen Pamir

Animals	mid-1970s	1999	1999 percentage of mid-1970s numbers
Sheep and goats	38600	8836	22.9
Yak	3544	1424	40.2
Horses	318	159	50.0
Camels	83	91	109.6

Source: own calculation based on data derived from SHAHRANI 1979, 177 and FOCUS survey Aug-Sep 1999

pastoral knowledge dissemination. Dearly required supplies and necessary consumer goods (wheat, salt, tea, vegetable oil, pulses and beans, matchboxes and other goods) could easily be transported from Murghab to the Afghan Pamirs as cost-effective motorized access is possible and links to a number of grazing grounds exist. As long as the Wakhan road is not extended – which is unlikely in the near future – to the Afghan Pamirs this option could overcome the bottleneck situation in which the Kirghiz are dwelling and suffering at present. All sides could profit from this trans-border exchange as cash flow is little on either side of the border. For humanitarian aid distribution permission was previously granted by the Russian border guards to use these supply lines.

6 Conclusions

Globalization and fragmentation were the points of departure to assess the recent developments in Wakhan Woluswali. Although Shah Ismael mentioned in his initial statement that the Afghan state presently seems to be absent it could be established that the activities of certain international, national and regional stakeholders are felt. Control is executed by commanders and government officials to a certain extent. Infrastructure development is left to outside non-profit organizations. The changing conditions in Kabul – the centralization of resources and the “normalization” of political control – effect in the Badakhshan periphery neglect and/or the occasional outside support from NGOs. The fragmented participation of local populations in ex-

change relations, the observed regional and social disparities are well embedded in the globalized framework of COOPER’s “pre-modern” state or what he qualifies as “failed states” in which governmental control has given way to violence and semi-independent groups (COOPER 2002). The attribution of post-imperial chaos and his call for a new legitimate authority from within or from outside powers in the form of a new Western imperialism (COOPER 2003) might be overrated and not applicable for the Afghan case. Classical forms of state control, distribution of salaries, gathering of data for statistics are absent. Continuing external interference and fund releases might stabilize the present government in the capital Kabul but it seems not to increase infrastructure development and a general confidence in the periphery. Alienation and exclusion are realized to a much higher extent by the concerned people. The detrimental effects of belonging to a nation state – such as being affected by worsening foreign relations and border closures, absence of a benevolent administration and infrastructure – are felt on a daily basis while the hope in future stabilization and improvements is meagre. The inhabitants of Wakhan Woluswali carefully observe the developments in Kabul and are forced to respond to any changes in the framework immediately.

Acknowledgements

The presented findings are based on three journeys to Wakhan Woluswali and based on fieldwork there in 1999, 2000, 2003. The first visit was under the protec-



Photo 3: Wakhi mountain farmers in Sarhad-e Wakhan rely for their sustenance on crop cultivation and yak breeding (Photo: H. KREUTZMANN 14.10.1999)

Wakhi-Bergbauern in Sarhad-e Wakhan gründen ihre Existenz auf Getreidebau und Yakzucht

tion of late Commander Najmuddin Khan and logistically supported by FOCUS Humanitarian Aid (cf. KREUTZMANN 2000b). The second and third journey were conducted by both authors with the help of FOCUS Humanitarian Aid and Agence d'Aide à la Coopération Technique et au Développement (ACTED). In FOCUS we thank Ali Mawji (now AKDN Kabul) and his team from Khorog, Tajikistan in 2000. We are particularly grateful for the logistical support from ACTED offices in Dushanbe, Murghab, Kabul and Taloqan in 2003. Special thanks to Engineer Qahar and his team for constant support, Karimullah for interpreting and M. Assef for safe driving and mastering the swollen glacier rivers and challenging roads.

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