

# Empowering Afghanistan's Extensive Livestock Producers

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## **Abstract**

Extensive livestock producers of Afghanistan have much in common with other herders around the world. Their communities face challenges of gaining access to public rangelands and acquiring or retaining land ownership. In combination with high illiteracy rates and low government representation they suffer from a vulnerability that can lead to conflicts over natural resources. Building capacity and empowering livestock producers to resolve conflicts peacefully is one way to assist them in meeting their challenges. Other benefits include gaining national identity, trust, and the respect of their fellow countrymen. The PEACE Project included conflict resolution as part of its agenda to increase extensive livestock production on Afghanistan's public rangelands. Understanding how livestock producers in Afghanistan were organized and how they traditionally solved issues was fundamental to developing a successful conflict resolution program. Earning trust with straight talk; making no promises that couldn't be delivered; remaining patient and continuing to listen despite setbacks; and, facilitating efforts for conflict resolution as opposed to directing them, were all critical to a successful outcome.

## **Background**

Decades of conflicts, drought, insecurity and poverty have left Afghanistan with little infrastructure and low capacity. In the past, it was a country that could boast that its agricultural sector contributed to more than half of its national income (1). More recently, it has become known as a country heavily dependent on food aid from international donors. Since 2001, donors and the Government of Afghanistan saw its greatest challenge as one of rebuilding its agriculture sector to overcome its food security issues. Challenges for the development of Afghanistan's extensive livestock sector were considered particularly daunting. The main reasons for this were the lack of information on the condition of Afghanistan's rangelands, livestock's nutritional status, current livestock management practices and the threats to the extensive livestock sector. In 2006, the PEACE<sup>1</sup> Project was initiated with funding from USAID to develop baseline information on Afghanistan's rangelands and to address some of the underlying causes for the decline in extensive livestock production (2).

Early research by USAID partners indicated that the majority of extensive livestock production in Afghanistan was carried out by a transhumant group of pastoralists referred to as the Kuchi. The Kuchi's livelihood is dependent on moving their livestock to rangeland areas in the Hindu Kush mountain range, in Central Afghanistan. Depending on where they start from, they either walk or drive their livestock into the mountains from the surrounding lowlands each spring and return to their wintering areas each fall. Through discussions with the Kuchi, the PEACE project determined that some of the more significant changes to this group's livelihood included the disruption of traditional migration routes, the cultivation of

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<sup>1</sup> PEACE: Pastoral Engagement, Adaptation and Capacity Enhancement.

rangelands, competition for critical grazing areas and conflicts over land tenure and traditional grazing rights. Herd sizes have declined significantly as a consequence and in some situations, many Kuchi are now without a livelihood.

The Kuchi account for approximately 8% of Afghanistan's total population yet in recent surveys of livestock markets in six of Afghanistan's largest cities, 60% of the small ruminants brought for sale originated with the Kuchi (3). Kuchi livestock not only represent the majority of the animals found in Afghanistan's livestock markets, they are also considered the primary source of animals purchased by farmers for fattening or rebuilding herds. As the Kuchi move across the landscape they commonly sell off unwanted animals in the local markets.

One of the primary objectives of the PEACE Project was to institutionalize a set of technologies within the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), that would provide better information about the condition of Afghanistan's rangelands. The technologies included a Livestock Early Warning System (LEWS), a Nutritional Profiling System (referred to as NIRS) and Livestock Market Information System (LMIS)<sup>2</sup>. LEWS provides current and projected estimates of native forage production for Afghanistan's rangelands up to 90 days in advance. The NIRS program provides information on seasonal diet quality for the different rangeland areas. The LMIS program tracks current livestock prices in the markets and disseminates this information to the producers and government as requested. These technologies provide information which will improve the decision-making ability of the producers - when to sell, when to move; how much should I stock, should I negotiate and for how much; and, to facilitate the management and policy-making capacity of the MAIL with respect to improving livestock production.

Better information for producers and policy makers is advantageous but if the producers cannot access the rangeland resources required to produce livestock, this information loses relevance. Therefore, another primary objective of the PEACE Project was to address land access and tenure issues through a conflict resolution program for Kuchi leaders. Due to the extent of these issues in Afghanistan, this program was destined to develop and expand more than we had originally envisioned. The conflict resolution program and the empowerment of the Kuchi will be the focus of the following case study.

### ***The Challenge***

Similar to extensive livestock producers in other parts of the world, the Kuchi face a myriad of problems ranging from illiteracy and lack of education, to limited access to health care. Of primary concern to the Kuchi, however, are conflicts over land tenure and access to public rangelands, because these directly impact their livelihood. These same conflicts are also the major source of ethnic tensions that have led to fatal clashes in recent years (4). Conflicts of land tenure and access to rangelands, experienced by the Kuchi, fall into three main categories:

- Conflicts with villagers or other Kuchi on winter rangelands - The Kuchi winter in the surrounding lowlands of Afghanistan. This includes all northern

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<sup>2</sup> The technologies were originally developed by the Global Livestock CRSP for east Africa and have subsequently been adapted for Mongolia, Afghanistan and West Africa.

provinces from Herat to Takhar; and all southern and eastern provinces from Helmand to Nangarhar. The issues for these areas include village expansion, rangeland conversion, rangeland degradation, lack of and costly winter forage resources.

- Conflicts with villagers during migration - Cultivation of rangeland corridors for wheat production is blocking access to summer rangelands areas. Where access is allowed, the Kuchi are often charged a fee to move and graze their animals through the area. Other conflicts along movement corridors are due to ethnic tensions that either have a historical or current context. Regardless of the basis, ethnic tensions have eroded any trust between the competing groups to the point that reconciliation is likely impossible without intervention.
- Conflicts with villagers over land tenure - This problem has been perpetuated by past and current ruling power which favored one ethnic group over another by granting land tenure rights to the group in preference. The areas involved in these conflicts are mostly the summer rangeland areas, including Bamyan and Badakshan. These can be very complicated issues and require good mediation efforts to resolve.

In addition to these types of conflicts, the Kuchi face the issue of general insecurity in Afghanistan. Their transhumant lifestyle makes them very vulnerable to the demands of criminals, commanders and anyone else in power. The challenge then, was to develop a program that empowered the Kuchi to peacefully resolve as many of these conflicts as they could for themselves, in a way that would be sustainable.

### ***Project Activities***

The PEACE Project's approach to conflict resolution was very simple: 1) understand how the Kuchi, as a culture, organized themselves; 2) understand their traditional means of solving problems and conflicts; and, 3) begin to deliver trainings in ways that incorporate lessons learned from the first two approaches and build capacity to facilitate the peaceful resolution of conflicts at the community, district and provincial level.

### ***Organization***

The Kuchi are organized by clans with a clear leadership structure beginning at the village level and extending to a "localized/regional" level. The extent of clan leadership is independent of geographic area and related instead to close family and political ties. In 2006, a new formal method of organization was instituted for and by the Kuchi. This involved the establishment of the Independent Department of Kuchi (IDK) as a mechanism for facilitating government representation and, for solving problems that extended beyond a clans control. The IDK operates as a quasi-Ministry but one with a single agenda: address all social, economic, and political issues affecting the Kuchi across Afghanistan, regardless of ethnicity.<sup>3</sup> When the PEACE Project started, IDK was a newly formed institution with little capacity or capital to really help the Kuchi. As of January 2010, the IDK had 31 Provincial Directors representing 31 of the recognized 34 provinces in Afghanistan.

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<sup>3</sup> Kuchi include a wide range of ethnicities: Pashtun (majority), Uzbek, Turkmen, Tajik, and Gojer

### *Traditional problem-solving mechanisms among the Kuchi*

In Afghanistan, *shuras* are defined as an “assemblies of leaders” that most groups use to solve problems and settle disputes. The Kuchi are no exception in that they have their own *shuras* and these are what are used to solve many of their own problems. However, few if any Kuchi leaders sit on *shuras* not of their own making including those representing districts and provinces in Afghanistan. *Shuras* are comprised of the most powerful and respected leaders in a province, district, or community. It is estimated that Afghanistan’s *shuras* are responsible for settling more than 80% of the conflict-based cases in the country (5). With an understanding of the Kuchi’s traditional problem-solving mechanism, we determined that the best approach for the resolution of their land-related conflicts would be to train those Provincial Directors who were active in solving problems already, and who demonstrated the most interest in gaining skills in the area of conflict resolution.

### *Delivering Conflict Resolution Skills*

The trainings in conflict resolution were not an easy sell in the beginning. The IDK Director viewed commodities, such as tents and solar panels, as more important to the Kuchi than a capacity building program with the aim of solving conflicts. This response was not surprising since transhumant pastoralists often have difficulty seeing beyond their immediate physical needs and accordingly make requests for short-term, quick-fix solutions. Convincing the IDK that they should participate in this program was accomplished by stating the obvious and remaining patient. We pointed out the long-term benefits of the program and how a capacity-building exercise would help solve other problems including those related to their short-term needs. We were also direct and honest about the project’s aims and budget. That these did not include the purchase of commodities or short-term fixes but rather, PEACE was about developing long-term solutions and capacity building, among other things. The resulting discussions with the Director and his staff took much time and many visits, over the course of which we repeated the benefits of a conflict resolution program. In the end, it was the staff who came to understand the benefits and who were responsible for convincing the Director to bring the Provincial Kuchi leaders to Kabul to meet with us and attend at least one training program.

Ten Provincial Kuchi Directors for IDK were invited to attend the first conflict resolution training. This workshop involved the presentation of an alternative approach to meeting their needs using peace-building techniques in the context of their traditional means of problem-solving. The workshop also allowed us to evaluate their interest and capacity. We found that the participants were very interested in the potential of resolving their own conflicts and they asked for the opportunity to participate in more skill-development workshops. The first trainings were relatively time-consuming due to the need for translation from English to Dari and Pashto, and, due to the fact that some leaders were illiterate. Subsequently, we began to work with the Sanayee Development Organization (SDO), an Afghan NGO experienced in delivering conflict resolution training in Dari and Pashto and more importantly, experienced in adapting trainings of this nature to a wide range of participants. After some time, we were able to develop several trainings that specifically addressed the Kuchi’s needs and the PEACE project’s goals.

Kuchi Provincial Directors received between three to seven trainings in conflict resolution and peace building techniques (6). Skills and topics covered during the trainings included:

- Benefits of peace
- Social ethics
- Understanding different perspectives
- Communicating your interests
- Listening to others
- Analyzing a conflict
- Mediation skills (characteristics, steps)
- Negotiation skills (interests versus positions)

Following these trainings, the leaders were asked to go back to their provinces and try to use their new skills during *shuras* to solve any issues of importance. To facilitate their efforts, PEACE began a program of providing limited sponsorship of the leader's monthly *shuras* (7). The aim of supporting the Provincial Kuchi *shuras* was two-fold. First, to provide a forum for each Provincial Director to increase dialogue between the Kuchi people and their government and second, to develop a mechanism by which conflict resolution and rangeland management information could be disseminated. At the start of this program, Kuchi Provincial leaders had insufficient funds to reimburse the District leaders for their transportation costs to attend each month's meeting. If Kuchi representatives could effectively pass messages between rural residents and decision-makers, then supporting them to attend meetings would be well worth the cost of transportation. In total, this effort led to the funding of 13 Provincial *shura* each month.

In exchange for support of their *shuras*, the Kuchi Provincial Directors were required to submit a written report after each meeting, to the IDK Director and PEACE office with details about the issues and conflicts discussed during each meeting, and the means by which they were resolved. Within a few months of supporting the Kuchi *shuras*, however, it became obvious that some directors struggled with producing a report of any substance. Subsequently, we followed up with additional trainings in organizational and report-writing techniques, in addition to developing a simple format that they could follow specific to solving this problem. Directors who responded well to this initiative are now writing reports that are detailed in the nature of the conflicts they are dealing with and in the solutions that have proven useful. More importantly, the reports have proven useful to the IDK Director in Kabul, as monthly information from the provinces has allowed the IDK to systematically document the Kuchi's problems at the provincial and national level and their efforts to resolve them. Increasing the capacity of the IDK to collect information from their directors may have been how we first began to earn the trust of this institution.

This program also proved quite useful in that it enabled the provincial leaders to demonstrate their skills in using peaceful negotiation as an alternative for solving conflicts. Several Provincial Kuchi Directors have told us that they have been able to prove to their constituents that their *shura* can help them and as a consequence, they are finding that their constituents are happy to support their leader's attendance of the monthly *shuras*. Increasing a Provincial Director's ability to resolve conflicts within his means, while improving his standing and that of the *shura* members to

their constituents has been the single most important factor in our gaining the trust of the Kuchi at the local level.

*Extension of Delivering Conflict Resolution Skills*

In Provinces where security was fine we would attend the *shuras* to see first-hand how they were functioning. It was during these site visits that we recognized how effective the organizational structure could be for dissemination of information of any kind. Therefore, we decided that the next step in the peace-building and conflict resolution process was to increase the capacity of the Kuchi to resolve conflicts, at the district level. Provincial Directors that demonstrated a commitment to peaceful resolution of conflicts during the *shuras* were asked to select district leaders from their provinces for this program. Following, nine leaders from three provinces were enrolled in a month-long training program that emphasized conflict resolution strategies and negotiation methods. Since this training, these nine leaders have worked to develop multi-ethnic Peace *shuras* and have participated in numerous mediation and conflict resolution exercises involving Kuchi and non-Kuchi stakeholders (Figure 1). The PEACE Project has actively monitored the impact of this training effort through continual feedback in the form of reports and phone calls.



In addition, the same nine Kuchi leaders have received support to carry out their own conflict resolution workshops. To date, they have trained another 160 Kuchi leaders in techniques for resolving conflicts peacefully. The nine leaders return to Kabul every three months for a one-day workshop where they present their work and, to receive additional training in areas specific to their needs.

Figure 1. A member of the Independent Department of Kuchi, Sangarmal, presents his ideas on solving conflicts for the Kuchi during a month-long training at SDO.

The number and variety of conflicts that have been resolved successfully has been quite surprising. Kuchi leaders reported specific details of family and clan feuds and explained how they settled the disputes. Some examples of the kinds of issues they have addressed are summarized in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

Conflicts Solved in Provincial <i>shuras</i>				
	Individual	Family	Clan	Inter-Ethnic
Personal	75	3	34	11
Land Access	0	0	19	12
Land Tenure	0	0	0	12
Rangeland conversion	0	0	0	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>42</b>

**Table 2**

**Other Topics commonly discussed by *shuras* and ambassadors**

	Individual	Family	Clan	Inter-Ethnic
<b>Building schools</b>	0	0	18	0
<b>Consensus Building</b>	0	0	23	45
<b>Elections</b>	39	0	0	0
<b>H1NI Virus</b>	26	0	0	45
<b>Total</b>	65	0	41	90

*Peace Ambassador Program*

As word spread about the trainings provided by the PEACE Project and SDO, we began to receive requests for similar trainings. One request came directly from President Karzai’s Advisor on Tribal Affairs and Director of the Peace Commission, Wahidullah Sabawoon. His request was that we develop trainings aimed at resolving long-standing land disputes between the Kuchi and Hazara in Wardak Province. While we were apprehensive at first to take on such a potentially volatile issue, in the end and with SDO, we proceeded (8). A memorandum of understanding was signed with the Peace Commission so there would be no misunderstandings about what either party would be responsible for delivering: the Peace Commission would be responsible for finding the correct leaders to attend the workshops and PEACE and SDO would be responsible for developing the trainings and funding the effort.

A series of trainings were initiated with 60 Kuchi and Hazara leaders attending separate 8-day workshops that covered basic peace-building and conflict resolution techniques. Subsequently, the groups participated in a joint workshop exercise, during which they engaged in a conflict assessment regarding issues that they shared in common and methods that might prove useful in resolving them. We avoided issues that were related to the specific conflicts between them. The intent of this approach was to build trust among the participants by having them realize that they shared many problems in common whose origins were mostly unrelated to the actions of any one particular person or group.

*Figure 2 While Abobaker, from the Peace Commission looks on, SDO trainer, Sherzai answers questions during group work.*



The most significant outcome of these workshops and the assessments was that both groups identified several critical points of agreement. Both Kuchi and Hazara leaders described a substantial government role in creating the problems they were experiencing over land tenure and the use of public rangelands. Participants equally advocated for the Office of Tribal Affairs to the President to become more active in seeking solutions to these

problems. They also agreed that given 30 years of war, that a quick resolution could not be achieved. Both groups shared the sentiment that political leaders do not want them to settle land access issues at the community level and that more importantly it is high-powered Kuchi and Hazara government leaders who are responsible for perpetuating the conflicts to further their own political agendas. Regarding their own personal history of conflicts, participants widely agreed that fighting has not helped them to solve any of their conflicts and should therefore be discouraged.

During 2009, with additional funding from the Global Livestock Collaborative Research Support Program (GL-CRSP)<sup>4</sup>, we were provided with the opportunity to bring together over 300 Kuchi and non-Kuchi leaders from five regions, to engage in joint conflict resolution workshops. Joint workshops were held for leaders of Faryab, Balkh, Kunduz, Ghazni and Wardak as these were the priority regions selected by the Peace Commission. For Wardak we conducted a follow-up exercise after the joint workshop. Ten Peace Ambassadors (PAs) comprised of 5 Kuchi and 5 Hazara leaders, were selected to continue to work at the community level to seek common ground to resolve the Kuchi/Hazara conflict over access to rangelands in the Hazarijat/Besud region. The PAs have been working for one year now to identify and resolve conflicts in the Behsud area and initial reports suggest that a positive resolution is possible at the community level for many conflicts (Table 3). They are reporting that one of the biggest conflicts over land tenure in Behsud may be solved this summer because of their work. Additional funding for this initiative in 2010 would be extremely useful to continue this type of work in other regions of Afghanistan.

**Table 3**

<b>Conflicts solved by Peace Ambassadors</b>				
	<b>Individual</b>	<b>Family</b>	<b>Clan</b>	<b>Inter-Ethnic</b>
<b>Personal</b>	36	12	13	17
<b>Land Access</b>	0	7	6	12
<b>Land Tenure</b>	0	5	3	8
<b>Rangeland conversion</b>	0	0	2	0
<b>Total</b>	36	24	24	37

### *Sustainability for Communities and Afghan Institutions*

One of the strongest ways to develop and facilitate a sustainable peace building and conflict resolution effort in Afghanistan is to invest in transferring skills to community leaders. By targeting Kuchi leaders at the Provincial and District levels we were able to provide a large number of community leaders with the skills needed to solve conflicts for their people despite the political situation.

Prior to the start of the Peace Ambassador (PA) program, the President's Peace Commission had limited success in resolving any significant inter-ethnic conflicts. When the Commission heard of the conflict resolution training program that the PEACE Project had with Kuchi Provincial leaders, they approached us to see if we thought this approach might serve as a better method to resolve some of the inter-

<sup>4</sup> GL-CRSP USAID Grant No. PCE-G-00-98-00036-00 to the University of California, Davis

ethnic, region-specific conflicts they were struggling with. With the implementation of the PA program, designed in collaboration with the PEACE Project and the SDO, the President's Peace Commission has demonstrated a continued commitment to support peace-building efforts in Afghanistan and, that they are willing to attempt new alternatives to solving Afghanistan's many conflicts. The Commission has also demonstrated the ability to recognize when communities can and cannot solve problems on their own; and, their willingness to work in collaboration with communities through the PAs when a more formal agreement is needed to seal an accord. By adopting this new approach in solving conflicts, the President's Peace Commission is demonstrating good leadership skills. Expanding the number of PA teams and regions where the program is implemented will demonstrate further confidence in this government institution and broader recognition of their leadership abilities in the area of community-based conflict resolution.

The Sanayee Development Organization has been in existence for 18 years and has focused much of its effort on building the capacity of communities to resolve conflicts peacefully. The PEACE Project came to SDO with a Kuchi-specific agenda and worked with them to develop a program of conflict resolution specifically aimed at tackling land access and tenure issues. In collaboration with the President's PEACE Commission, we further developed this program to include a multi-ethnic approach to resolve Kuchi/non-Kuchi conflicts. SDO will continue to become stronger and more capable with the implementation of this program as they, along with all collaborators, learn from the experiences of the communities and PAs.

Illiteracy and the lack of education were by far the biggest constraints to project implementation. Report writing skills were nearly non-existent in the Kuchi leadership even at the provincial level. Also, but to a lesser degree, the unwillingness of most Afghans to publically state what they believe for fear of reprisals hampered a wider awareness and reduced the potential for a rapid increase in supporters. Effectively, this means that a program of this nature takes time to build momentum. Likewise, earning trust is a long-term effort and requires commitment and time. These constraints all highlight the reasons for donors to understand and commit to longer funding cycles. Sustainable development is rarely a short-term, high-impact endeavor.

Taking this effort to the next level is also essential. While village and Kuchi elders appear to be in agreement that peaceful resolution is possible, more emphasis should be placed on including the younger members of these communities. PAs offer an excellent opportunity to reach this demographic, and it is possible that the community Peace Ambassador model could be successfully modified to train younger PAs whose responsibility would be to work side by side with their elder leaders. Facilitating Peace Ambassadors as a viable community conflict mitigation tool should also be an option for other communities. This year, PEACE hopes to increase the number of PA's to 50 and the number of regions where they work to 5. If the Peace Commission continues to remain engaged throughout the year, the program would be ready to scale up to include 300 PAs and most of Afghanistan.

## Conclusions

The PEACE project recognizes, as do many others that there can be “no development without peace, and no peace without development” (9). This is particularly true when it comes to resolving conflicts involving natural resources. Therefore, all proposed activities targeting extensive livestock producers will continue to be enhanced and enabled through critical peace-building and conflict resolution workshops. Working within the context of the Kuchi’s current organizational structure and culture, the PEACE Project will continue to use existing and new methods to empower Afghanistan’s Kuchi leaders, in an attempt to build a large cohort of leaders that understand how and why it is best to solve problems peacefully and constructively. In this way, we can improve the social, economic, natural resource and political environment in Afghanistan, for communities through community involvement.

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*This research was made possible through support provided to the University of California, Davis by the Mission to Afghanistan, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the terms of Cooperative Agreement No. 306-A-00-06-0052 1-00 and through support provided to the Global Livestock Collaborative Research Support Program by the Office of Agriculture, Bureau of Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade, USAID under the terms of Grant No. PCE-G-00-98-00036-00. The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID.*