

Damon Wolter
Keokuk High School
Keokuk, IA
Afghanistan, Factor 14: Conflict Resolution

Afghanistan: The Negative Effects of Widespread Warfare on the Afghan Economy and Agricultural System

In most civilized places around the world people fret over paying the bills and making ends meet. Many unfortunate people that live in the less developed, third world countries worry about where their next meal will come from. Now imagine worrying about getting shot, or blown up, or being taken captive every single day on top of all the other problems people from third world countries deal with. This is the situation in which the citizens of Afghanistan find themselves. Out of the last 36 years in Afghanistan's history, there has been at least one ongoing war in the country for 33 of those years (Clarkson). When the Afghans haven't been fighting with Russia or the United States, they have fought civil wars between themselves. The people of Afghanistan really don't have time to worry about economic problems and agricultural advancements. They instead fight to stay alive. The short term revival of the struggling Afghan economy ended in 1996 when the radical extremist group, the Taliban, took over the government. The Taliban shut down all export industries that provided a large portion of the country's income. After those initial incidents, the Afghan economy completely fell apart and stayed that way for many years (Clarkson). Recently, with the assistance of the United States government, the economy of Afghanistan has started to recover and become somewhat proficient. Families find it difficult to earn a sizeable income in the distraught economy. Job opportunities are very limited and hard to come by. A large majority of the country lives in poverty. Nutrition and sanitation conditions are poor. There are no current health regulations on food in Afghanistan, which results in the manufacturing of unsafe foods. Millions of people in Afghanistan live with the pains of malnutrition. As many as eight to ten million people face starvation in Afghanistan every year (Cogan). There are several different programs and principles that could help pave the way for better nutrition and finance conditions in Afghanistan. One thing that is needed for Afghan agriculture to improve is farmer training programs and partnerships. Afghanistan also needs a vast amount of aid from outside nations to increase food availability. Another thing that would be beneficial to the Afghan economy would be investing money to develop irrigation systems throughout the country.

An average Afghan family consists of seven to eight people. Mothers in the families are typically much younger than their husbands and marry before the legal age of sixteen. On average, husbands are around seven years older than their wives (IRIN). It is also common for the elderly to live with younger generations, not on their own. Lots of families in Afghanistan are single-parent households. Over 70,000 households are headed by women that have been abandoned or widowed. A typical Afghan family is composed of two adults or elderly and five kids (IRIN). Families in Afghanistan are generally very young. Life expectancy at birth is only 50.49 years. Over 42 percent of the population is between the ages of zero and fourteen (Central Intelligence Agency). Many times kids are forced to quit school at a young age to find work to help support the family. Twenty-five to thirty percent of Afghan children between the ages of five and fourteen are involved in some form of child labor. This may be one of the few reasons Afghanistan has such a low literacy rate. The literacy rate of the total population in Afghanistan is just a mere 28 percent. The literacy rate of males is 43 percent, but females living in the

country only have a literacy rate of thirteen percent. The average school life expectancy in Afghanistan is around nine years. Boys typically attend school longer than girls (Central Intelligence Agency). Health Care in Afghanistan is nearly invisible. There is no financial health care aid to support injured or killed citizens. For every 100,000 people living in Afghanistan there are only 19 physicians and forty hospital beds (Central Intelligence Agency). The diet of most Afghan families is generally limited. In most places civilians do not have access to certain forms of protein or nutrition. A typical Afghan diet consists of an unleavened flat bread called nan, rice, meat, soups, a type of yogurt called mast, vegetables, fruit, and tea. People living in Afghanistan drink tea for almost every meal (Afghan Museum of History).

The traditional society and customs of Afghanistan have made it more difficult for future generations to find ways to make a living. Afghanistan has a patriarchal society, one where the fathers are the provider and ruler of a household (Afghan Museum of History). In the past, children and wives have relied on the man of the family to put food on the table and provide income. Constant warfare has blown a hole into this once successful society. For over three generations fathers were forced to leave their families to become soldiers and fight in the everchanging wars of Afghanistan (Clarkson). Once the men in a family left, it was very rare for them to come back. Men that had provided for their families became just another casualty number or a prisoner of war. Back home, wives who had been taught to do nothing but rely on their husbands for food were forced to venture out into the workforce. By 2015, there were over 70,000 Afghan households that were headed by women because they had been either abandoned or widowed (IRIN). Post war generations were put in a situation set up for failure. Women, who now headed a large portion of the families in Afghanistan, had no clue how to make a living or find a way to put food on the table. They had become accustomed to the patriarchal society that had been in place in the country for thousands of years and were not comfortable with trying to change it. Because the mothers of children couldn't make enough money to survive, their children were forced to leave school and join the workforce. This was one of the main factors that has led to a dangerously low literacy rate in Afghanistan (Central Intelligence Agency). Once children left school they had few, if any, marketable tools to employers. Typically, children would find themselves working in sweatshops or other dangerous low paying jobs (Asia Times). Even with multiple incomes coming from the mother and older children of a family, life is still a struggle. Wages are very low in Afghanistan and injuries are frequent at work. The patriarchal society that was once successful in Afghanistan has been ruined by the effects of widespread war and now has the country headed towards failure.

Before the Soviet War in Afghanistan began in 1979, Afghan farms were very abundant and prosperous. The decades of constant warfare and the abandonment of traditional farming techniques has destroyed the agricultural system of Afghanistan. Afghan farms today are very small, on average they are located on properties the size of about five hectares. About 77 percent of Afghan farmers grow annual crops. Annual crops do not create as much food as perennial crops, but they do provide more income (Kuhn). Opium is the largest and most valuable crop grown in Afghanistan. In recent years, the crop has seen a substantial increase in value. Other crops that Afghan farmers grow are corn, wheat, barley, grapes, and rice. Crop sizes for Afghan farmers are generally small because of limited resources and land availability. With that being said, Afghan farmers can still make a little over \$4,000 a year if they plant and grow opium (Kuhn). The main animals raised on Afghan farms are sheep and goats. People use these animals to make products such as lamb coats, milk, and cheese. The people of Afghanistan mainly grow crops using dry subsistence farming techniques. Farmers are currently working on developing forms of irrigation to water their plants. Crop sizes are increasing every year as a result of better technology and

technique. Farmers can continue to improve their harvests in the future by getting training from agricultural programs.

The economy of Afghanistan was crushed by the political turmoil of the Taliban and the numerous wars fought in the country. When the Taliban came to power in 1996, they cut off all of the export and import industries and businesses in Afghanistan (Smithers). These large industries provided a large portion of the country's income. Without this income, the economy crashed. Sales, income, and monetary value in Afghanistan hit all time lows. When the United States invaded Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban, world leaders realized how severe the economic situation was for the Afghan people. Several different countries and corporations donated billions of dollars to help fund the recovery of the Afghan economy. Years of hard work by organizations like the United Nations and additional donations have led to the slow recovery of the economy of Afghanistan. Today, the Afghan economy has recuperated and is almost to the point where it could be called somewhat reliable. As of 2010, the average income for an Afghan worker was \$426. That was a significant jump from the average income of \$70 that was recorded in 2004 (Asia Times).

Malnutrition and starvation are very serious problems in Afghanistan. These problems are the results of decades of war and severe droughts producing low crop yields in the past years. It is estimated that over 55 percent of Afghan children have currently suffered irreversible damage to their bodies from malnutrition. Experts say that damage has occurred to the cognitive and growth development functions in the bodies of these children. The damage was caused by not receiving enough nutrition in the first two years of their lives (Graham-Harrison). Eight to ten million Afghans face starvation every year; and tens of thousands of people die from starvation and malnutrition in Afghanistan. Experts are worried that these numbers could increase if changes are not made. They have declared there to be a hunger crisis in the country of Afghanistan (Cogan).

Numerous political and military conflicts have been negatively affecting the people of Afghanistan for many decades. In 1979, the Russians invaded Afghanistan and it marked the start of a war that would last over ten years. Shortly after that war ended in 1989, another one was started over a battle for political power. It wasn't until 1992 that Afghan political parties could come to an agreement and sign the Peshawar Accord (Clarkson). In 1996, the radical Islamist-extremist group, the Taliban, violently rebelled against the government. They killed Afghan president, Mohammed Najibullah, and his brother and hung them on a traffic post in the middle of the country's capital. Armed resistance immediately followed the assassination of the president, but the government had no chance against the mighty military power of the Taliban. The Taliban asserted complete control over every aspect of Afghan life. They stopped the flow of goods into and out of Afghanistan, which in turn created destroyed the Afghan economy and spread immense poverty throughout the country. They also made changes to society by requiring women to completely clothe their bodies in public (Smithers). In 2001, the United States invaded Afghanistan to overthrow the tyrannical forces of the Taliban. Allied forces took over Kabul, the Afghan capital, that same year, but fighting and unrest in the country is still ongoing today (Clarkson). Conditions today are much better than they were ten or fifteen years ago, but citizens still look over their shoulders expecting to see another war.

The long history of war in Afghanistan has severely hurt the availability of food, income, and agricultural production of the Afghan people. Years of bombardment and warfare have completely destroyed the

once fertile soil in Afghanistan. In many places the soil was exposed to the elements and eroded away. This has led to a dramatic decrease in agricultural production. Another cause of the decrease in agricultural production in Afghanistan is the shortage of farmers. Many farmers have been killed in the fighting of numerous wars. Others were kept from farming by dictatorial governments and extremist forces. While military powers fought over control of the land, nobody was teaching the next generations of Afghans the principles of farming. A major farmer shortage has been the result of these incidents. The Taliban cut off all import and export industries in Afghanistan when they came to power. These actions crippled the Afghan economy and marked the start of a long economic depression. Even with billions of dollars of aid from outside countries, the people of Afghanistan are still feeling the effects of the economic crash started by the Taliban today. Personal and household income rates fell to all time lows, and they stayed there for a few years until the American government overthrew the Taliban. At times during the U.S. War in Afghanistan, major roads and bridges were destroyed to weaken the Taliban. The destruction of the country's infrastructure has made it much harder for food and goods to travel across the country. This compounded with a decrease in agricultural production has led to food availability being very bad in Afghanistan. Even if families can somehow make enough money to buy food, sometimes it just isn't available. Much of the food that the public does buy is contaminated or unsanitary. Food quality is another problem in Afghanistan. Unsanitary and spoiled foods have led to many bacterial infection cases in the country.

The political and armed conflicts in Afghanistan have improved, and are continuing to improve, faster than ever before. This problem has been constantly improving for a number of years. For the first time in decades, Afghans can say that there isn't political unrest in their country. They can also report that their isn't a violent radical group trying to overthrow their government in place. Armed conflict has been going on in Afghanistan for many decades. While the fighting still isn't over, conditions in the country are much safer and the people once again feel free. The Taliban has been destroyed; and now the only other main threat in Afghanistan is Al-Qaeda. Today, even Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan possesses little to no influence and power over the people. The present status of political and armed conflict resolution in Afghanistan is good, terrific compared to the past, and is continuing to get better. The United States has eradicated all violent groups in the country and has trained Afghan soldiers to take over the fighting. Improving this factor would mean increases in income, food availability, and agricultural production for the Afghan people. Peace would allow people of the country to focus on the hardships they face in life rather than worrying about surviving. Without constant threats, the people could develop new farming techniques, build new roads, and construct a reliable economy. These developments would make daily life much better for the Afghan people.

There are not any major issues that could affect the resolution of political or armed conflict in Afghanistan. Changes in the climate may affect the strategies of allied forces or induce setbacks on operations, but they will not lead to surrenders or defeats. Population growth could affect the economy and agricultural system in Afghanistan, but it won't help enemy forces in any ways. Energy demand and pollution are two other factors that could have a significant impact on the people of Afghanistan; but these factors won't have an impact on the outcome of a war. The resolution of armed and political conflicts in Afghanistan will happen through hard work, determination, and the use of superior American weaponry and technology.

There are many different solutions to the hunger and economic crisis in Afghanistan. One way thing that I think would be very beneficial to the country would be partnerships with outside parties that provide information on farming techniques. I think a partnership between the Afghan people and the United States Army could help increase agricultural production. The United States Army and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) have teamed up to try to improve Afghan agriculture. Years ago, marines coming back from the war in Afghanistan asked the USDA to train people working in agriculture in Afghanistan. They had witnessed firsthand the harmful problems with Afghan farming techniques. The USDA immediately partnered with top agricultural universities in the United States to create a standardized training program. Once the coursework for the program was completed, the United States Army sent a specific group of Sergeants from around the country to the campus of California State University to go through the mentally intense training program (Fimbres). Since the start of the program in 2012, the USDA and the Army have worked hard to teach hundreds of American soldiers about evolutionary agricultural techniques and tips to improve crop yields. The marines also learned about forms of irrigation and harvesting principles. The initial goal of the program was to develop a secure agricultural background for the nation, where 85-90 percent of Afghan citizens became farmers or involved in agricultural industries. The USDA believed this accomplishment could lead to the complete revival of the Afghan economy. So far, the American soldiers have done lots of great work in Afghanistan and plan to continue to train farmers for many more years (Fimbres). Another thing that could majorly improve situations in Afghanistan would be foreign aid. Investments in agriculture, transportation, and sanitary water systems would lead to better food availability and the production of safer crops. I believe that developments in irrigation may be the best solution to the hunger crisis in Afghanistan. The climate of the country is scorchingly hot. The extreme weather leads to dry conditions for farming. Irrigation systems would allow farmers to harvest crops nearly year round. It would also increase crop production and give farmers the chance to grow more valuable crops. Just one irrigation system in a community could support several different farms. I suggest that a portion of the foreign aid is used to invest in specifically Driptech irrigation systems. Communities and families could also come together and combine their extra money to purchase a system. Driptech is a company whose goal is to “alleviate poverty by creating extremely affordable water efficient irrigation for small-plot farmers in developing nations” (Frykman). They work well in dry environments by reducing the amount of water needed to irrigate farming plots. These irrigation systems are priced 70 percent lower than typical drip irrigation and can increase crop yields by 20-90 percent (Stillwater). Driptech irrigation has already been tested out in other countries with a climate and situation similar to Afghanistan. India has seen firsthand the efficiency and simplicity of driptech irrigation. Once installed, small-hold Indian farmers have harvested more crops while majorly reducing labor costs (Stillwater). These programs and changes may be what Afghanistan needs to solve the hunger crisis.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) would also play a large part in solving the hunger problem in Afghanistan. Organizations, such as Afghan Aid and CARE, have already established relations with the Afghan people and are in good standing with the citizens. I think another portion of the foreign aid should be put towards agricultural programs headed by these companies. It is important for the Afghans to learn how to farm correctly. Once they have the proper funding and training, workers from CARE and Afghanaid would travel out into cities across Afghanistan to teach proper farming techniques. Some Afghanaid workers are already stationed throughout Afghanistan and would not have to move to help with the agricultural program (Afghanaid). Non-governmental organizations have a good relationship

with the local citizens and would be trusted much more than a group such as the United States Army (Cooperative for Relief and Assistance Everywhere). By traveling out into communities instead of forcing adults to leave their families to go to school, NGOs are protecting towns from possible invaders. Terrorist groups are still active in small numbers in Afghanistan. If the fathers left a city for agricultural training that community would be vulnerable to an attack. By traveling into communities NGO workers could purposefully help prevent future wars. Once there, these teachers would also help each town set up a community garden which would benefit everyone, not just select groups. Community gardens would play a vital role in helping solve Afghanistan's hunger problem. Citizens would be able to get firsthand experience farming with the new techniques they were being taught. They would not only be shown how to plant and grow crops, but also how to use technology and install Driptech irrigation systems. Once they learn how to grow certain crops together in town, farmers will be able to take that knowledge back to their separate farms and use it on their own land. These gardens would provide new opportunities for women and orphans who are usually shoved into sweatshop labor. The workers sent by CARE and Afghanaid will be able to direct citizens in the right way and show them how to create a successful garden. Once Afghans see what they can accomplish they will start to feel a sense of entrepreneurship and self reliability. These feelings will set citizens out on the right path to eventually being able to provide for themselves. Women who previously had no clue how to properly feed or support their families will now have the knowledge to do so. Another benefit of a community garden would be the close-knit relationship the people of a community would build over the course of a planting season. Citizens will be taught to work together and rely on one another. Because of the decades of war, Afghans are often suspicious of others and do not like to accept help at times. This makes it very hard to help solve the hunger problem. Community gardens would teach the people of Afghanistan to trust and honor a helping hand. Another problem community gardens would help with is food reliability. Farmers can do everything in their power to try to provide a large crop yield, but droughts and devastating sandstorms are unpreventable. Community gardens would provide food reliability if something like this was to happen. A community garden would be a place to go to as a last resort for food. This way, farmers go out and apply the new farming techniques they learned. If for some reason they fail to produce crops, they will have a fallback plan instead of being forced to starve. Community gardens have proven to be successful in solving at least a portion of the hunger in other cities around the world. Mumbai, India for example has used community farms and gardens to produce large yields of crops. Citizens there found that the gardens not only helped solve starvation, but also made the city a cleaner and safer place to live (Mukherji). Community gardens could be the ultimate solution to the hunger problem in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has a dark past that is filled with political unrest and violence. Political and armed conflicts have been going on in the country for several straight decades. These conflicts have led to the destruction of the Afghan economy and agricultural system. Wars have left the country in ruins and without an accessible infrastructure. All of these problems have combined to create an extremely dangerous hunger crisis in Afghanistan. An average Afghan family is made up of seven people, two adults and five children. They have little to no access to health care and possess very poor literacy rates. Farms in Afghanistan are typically small. Farmers mainly plant and grow opium, corn, and wheat. They also raise sheep and goats. Civilians struggle to find clean and sanitary food. Almost all Afghan citizens do not receive the amount of nutrition recommended for an average person. These conditions have created a disaster where millions of people living in the country suffer from malnutrition and starvation. While the future of Afghanistan seems hazy and unclear, conditions are improving dramatically. The Taliban have

been overthrown and a just political system has been restored. A long history of war in the country is coming to an end. The only enemy forces in the country still fighting are minority extremist groups. There are many different ways the people of Afghanistan can improve their agricultural system and economy. One way is for Afghan farmers to receive training from experienced professionals on specific farming techniques and procedures. Another thing that would substantially help resolve the food problems of Afghanistan would be foreign aid. The economy and food markets need investments to fully recover. The development of irrigation systems in Afghanistan could support farmers by increasing crop yields, and in turn assist in solving the hunger crisis. The future looks bright for Afghanistan. With the administration of a couple different programs the economy and agricultural systems of Afghanistan could make a complete recovery in less than a decade.

Works Cited

- Afghanaid. "Afghanaid Projects." *Afghanaid UK*. Afghanaid. 4 March. 2013. Web. 26 June. 2015.
- Afghanistan Museum of History. "Way of Life." *Afghanistan's Web Site*. Afghanistan, 16 Nov. 2011. Web. 13 Mar. 2015.
- Central, Intelligence Agency. "Afghanistan - 2015, CIA World Factbook." *Afghanistan - 2015, CIA World Factbook*. Central Intelligence Agency, 13 Mar. 2014. Web. 24 Mar. 2015.
- Clarkson, Ben. "Afghanistan profile - Timeline." *BBC News*. BBC, 31 Mar. 2015. Web. 1 April 2015.
- Cogan, James. "Millions face starvation in Afghanistan." *World Socialist Web Site*. International Committee of the Fourth International, 9 Jan. 2009. Web. 25 Mar. 2015.
- Cooperative for Relief and Assistance Everywhere. "Afghanistan." *CARE*. CARE. 25 April 2014. Web. 19 June. 2015.
- Fimbres, Felix R. "Soldiers Partner with USDA to Improve Afghan Agriculture." Association of the United States Army." *Association of the United States Army*. United States Army, Apr. 2012. Web. 06 Apr. 2015.
- Frykman, Peter. "Our Mission and Our Product." *Driptech*. Driptech, 24 Sep. 2008. Web. 1 July. 2015.
- Graham-Harrison, Emma. "Half of Afghan children suffer irreversible harm from malnutrition." *theguardian*. theguardian, 26 Jan. 2014. Web. 18 Mar. 2015.
- Jones, Peter. "AFGHANISTAN: Family-related Determinants of Poverty." *IRINnews*. IRIN, 8 Apr. 2010. Web. 28 Mar. 2015.
- Killid Correspondents. "Afghans Wealthier, Remain Among Poorest." *Asia Times*. Asia Times Online, 29 Jan. 2010. Web. 30 Mar. 2015.
- Kuhn, Gary A. "Crop Income Projection for Afghanistan, 2010." *Roots of Peace*. Roots of Peace, 21 Sep. 2010. Web. 16 Mar. 2015.
- Mukherji, Anahita. "Mumbai Goes Green on the Terrace." *City Farmer News*. India Times, 28 Aug. 2011. Web. 29 June. 2015.
- Smithers, Nancy. "Afghanistan: 15 Years Ago The Taliban Took Kabul." *Huffpost*. World Post, 27 Sep. 2011. Web. 27 Mar. 2015.
- Stillwater, Andrew. "Driptech: Improving Water Efficiency and Reusing Wastewater." *Securing Water for Food*. Securing Water for Food: A Grand Challenge for Development, 16 Aug. 2014. Web. 21 June. 2015.
- "United Nations Security Council" (PDF). *UN*. Naval Postgraduate School. December 5, 2001. Retrieved March 21, 2014.