

## USIP - ADST

### Afghanistan Experience Project

#### Interview #48

#### Executive Summary

The interviewee, a soil scientist by training, was the USDA representative to the Ghazni PRT from January, 2005 – July, 2005. He describes several very successful projects undertaken during his tenure, including a micro-finance project to provide seed/fertilizer to farmer in the province and the financing of a dam rebuilding project to restore flooded croplands. Both of these projects were implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture officials in an impressive fashion. In order to help the very poorest farmers, the interviewee describes a very low maintenance fruit tree distribution project, which is intended to provide income and excellent fruit for decades. This project also was notable for the clear buy-in and commitment on the part of the Afghan farmers. The objective underlying all of these agricultural projects in Ghazni was threefold: to improve the economic well-being of the area, to provide jobs, especially to the unemployed males of the province, and to deny to Taliban recruiters these same unemployed males who might otherwise be ripe for recruitment.

Because of the non-permissive security situation, NGOs were scarce in the Ghazni area. Nonetheless, the interviewee describes a very collaborative relationship among the PRT, different NGOs (including RAMP and ICARDA) on various water projects, as well as USAID. He also illustrates how flexibility in his mandate allowed him to respond to opportunities that built important relationships with the local people. For example, he discovered that in one area of the province there were few fruit trees because the mountain passes had always been blocked by snow until too late in the planting season; he was able to arrange a helicopter airlift of some 15,000 fruit tree seedlings in time for spring planting to address that problem.

Although the interviewee thinks the PRT concept is quite good, that his PRT team accomplished a great deal, and that the local population appreciated the PRT's being there, he also feels strongly that the decision to centralize PRT funding definitely hampered his work at the local level. He also criticizes the increasing focus on development projects only for "troublesome" areas. He felt that that policy sent the wrong message to those areas not so directly threatened by Taliban, but which were still in need of development assistance.

Finally, the interviewee felt that greater focus was needed on agriculture, that rather than being a "side item" in the process, it should be a "main menu item," with more guidance coming from USDA rather than from non-agricultural agencies. He also points out that the fact that USDA does not have central funding to support its representatives, whose salaries are paid by their home offices, is problematic."

United States Institute of Peace  
Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training  
Afghanistan Experience Project

Interview #48

Interviewed by: Barbara Nielsen  
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*Q: Could you tell us when you were at the Ghazni PRT?*

A: Ghazni PRT was approximately from the middle of January, around January 16<sup>th</sup> of 2005 until July the 10<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

*Q: Okay. What was your job there?*

A: I was an agricultural advisor for USDA to the PRT.

*Q: Could you tell a little bit about your background and how you were recruited for this job?*

A: My background is that I've been with USDA, the Soil Conservation Service. They changed the name to Natural Resource Conservation Service. I've been with them about 31 years, a little over 31 now in South Carolina, mostly in the low country. I'm a district conservation management field officer and have been for most of those 31 years. They advertised the job on the Internet on the NRCS (USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service) website or advertised it, not really a job, but the opportunity to apply if you were interested in going and I did that. Part of my background as well is that I've done volunteer work as an agricultural advisor or natural resource advisor around the world with some NGOs over the years including Northwest Pakistan in the tribal territory with the Pashtuns. That was, I think, in '97, so I've done enough, usually less than two or three weeks instead of six months, but I've done enough of it to know that I like it. I just thought this was a good opportunity to be able to go and that's how I ended up.

*Q: Right, particularly your experience with the Pashtuns in Northwest Pakistan would be very relevant, I would think.*

A: Yes ma'am, very relevant.

*Q: Did that mean that you had some language skills as well?*

A: No, no language skills. While we were there we had interpreters all the time so that really didn't prove to be a problem.

*Q: You had mentioned soil conservation in your background; was your specialty in soil conservation?*

A: My degree is in plants and soils and yes, I mean, most anything with resources from soil, particularly involving the sun, water, plants and wildlife, but just as far as what's relevant to Afghanistan, I was working at elevation while here I'm close to sea level. I've dealt with more hurricanes than dust storms, but the same basic management problems no matter where it's at, particularly irrigation and dikes and dams is what I do have a lot of experience in. Those were areas that they wanted to focus on or at least thought they did in that part of Afghanistan. So, that's why they sent me there.

*Q: You worked by yourself or what kind of a team did you have to work with?*

A: In the PRT?

*Q: In the PRT.*

A: Yes, I was the only agricultural person. There were about 10 of us in Afghanistan total and each of us was in a different PRT or regional command center and yes, we basically functioned alone and it depends on what opportunity there was. We worked through the central government, through the provincial ministers of agriculture and their staff. Worked with other NGOs, with NGOs. Basically wherever there was an opportunity. The PRT made a lot of trips for missions to the field where they would stop in a village and deliver some humanitarian aid, clothes, food and that type of thing. We would always meet with the elders in that village and as much as possible find out what their needs were, what opportunities there might be. After a while you get a good picture of what the whole area is like. By the time I left I had a good handle on the major problems and opportunities, but there were always opportunities, there's no shortage of natural resource needs since 85% of the population depends on agriculture.

*Q: It sounds like it would be a big job for one person.*

A: It is.

*Q: What kinds of things did you pick out as good opportunities that you could actually tackle while you were there?*

A: We were trying to do three things as the PRT: improve security, look for projects that would improve the economic base in the recovery of the nation economically as well as build a relationship with the people. We would look for projects that would kind of do all those things and quite often we worked in the areas that were the more hazardous areas just because there were high unemployment rates there. There were a lot of unemployed young males who generally were the ones in the Taliban or whoever was hiring. We would look for things that would provide jobs and improve the income in those areas to help draw them away from the other - the negative opportunities they would have from somebody else in the country. The first big project we did or really the first project was a

microfinance project. They do not have any real credit or banking system in that country. They had a great need for seed and fertilizer and improved varieties and we did a province- wide project in Ghazni and we also worked with Vardak Province, which is next door. For Ghazni province, basically, instead of having a giveaway program, we set up a system through the ministry of agriculture and through each district governor in the province who picked out the lowest income farmers to whom we would provide seed and fertilizer. They signed for it. The governor signed for it. They worked up some good forms themselves. Actually they impressed us with the job they did on the recordkeeping.

*Q: Is that right?*

A: Basically we furnished them, it ended up being potato seed, instead of wheat seed, but we furnished them some seed and fertilizer not free, but as a loan and they didn't have to pay it back until harvest. What we found was most of the farmers there were working in another country. Either Iran, Iraq or either in a big city like Kandahar or Kabul most of the year. They kind of farm part time particularly after seven years of drought and this year, 2005 was the first year they'd had normal rainfall in about seven or eight years, so there are a lot of things going on at one time over there, but the microfinance was to kind of help them get some seed and fertilizer in their hands for the poor people where they didn't have to outlay any cash. We tried to avoid creating a welfare system anymore than necessary and also to help the government learn how to manage any kind of a program, doing the paperwork, holding people responsible, collecting the money and if they do a good job on the collection, then they've got that same money to turn around and do the same thing with next year. In theory it would keep right on rolling and even if it was only 80% it still would last a number of years and help them understand about borrowing money and build some credit basically among the agricultural sector if they handle it right.

*Q: This project was basically totally unfamiliar to the farmers who were going to be participating? They hadn't done anything like that in the past?*

A: No, they had not done anything like it. We struggled a little bit to start with and everything didn't run smoothly, but the assistant minister of agriculture, we ended up working with him primarily and they really did a good job. It's a big province and travel is not easy and slow. We had four feet of snow on the ground and some of the passes were blocked all the way up until the middle of May, so you have some areas that are very isolated and yet they were still able to make it all work. For the first time they were able to do something on that; I was impressed. I thought they did a good job.

They had a dam above the city of Ghazni which broke because they finally got enough water and they tried to keep a little too much of it and the dam broke and killed some people and pretty well destroyed about 4,000 gerib of cropland. We had a program where we went in and helped pay contractors to work with the farmers to bring it back to farmable conditions. Cleaning out the ditches, building the dikes back up, getting the rocks back out of the fields, removing the trees, replanting some of the fruit orchards.

These type things and again we did that through the minister of agriculture. They did a good job on handling that and lining up all the contractors and getting it done.

*Q: You mentioned that when the dam broke it destroyed 4,000 gerib?*

A: Gerib, G-E-R-I-B. A gerib is about a half-acre.

*Q: You have described that you worked very closely through the ministry of agriculture.*

A: Yes.

*Q: These kinds of projects obviously don't require military effort?*

A: Actually everything requires military effort because of security problems and we operated in the red zone, so it was fairly intense. If it was less than, less than 10K we always had two vehicles with me, at least two guns in a vehicle. So, even to go to town to meet with them requires military presence. To go over 10K which is not that far particularly in that kind of situation then you've got enough armors in the convoy to go. The biggest thing that I had to get used to over there was not being able to go and meet with people. Everything that we did had to be designed so that we would have a minimum number of trips because we could not announce when we were going because if you told them when you were going there was a good chance that you'd have a mine in the road when you got there. You had to show up and so you had to have them come to the PRT quite often to do business; going downtown with the ministry usually was much less risky, but when you went to some areas that we did projects in, you just had to show up. You could tell them you'd be there in another week or two, but you never could say I'll be there Friday morning, it just didn't work or that was a bad day to pick, Monday morning. We did fruit tree projects in a number of the districts. Basically we furnished free fruit trees. They would distribute them, 20, 30, 40 fruit trees per farmer and the district governors and the minister of agriculture would select the poorest farmers to get the trees and one of the reasons we liked the fruit trees is that they grow real good fruit. It's a good income producer and it is, you know, you're putting something there that they will be able to look at and remember how they got that for years to come and their children, it is also something that will be a producer for years to come with basically no addition except a little bit of pesticides and fertilizer and water. So, for a minimum amount of maintenance they've got something that will produce income for a long period of time.

*Q: What kind of fruit trees?*

A: Apricots, apples, pears, peaches, mostly apricots and apples and they dry them because they don't have cold storage. They do a lot of dried fruits. Apples and apricots were the two main ones that they wanted. They also do a lot of, grow a lot of grapes there and primarily most of them were used for raisins, both the white raisin and a black raisin. The last project that I worked on there and got funded was a raisin processing facility in a very high risk area where some of the greater Taliban risk was. They're

building that now. I don't know if they haven't quite finished it because they sent me some pictures of it the other day. It's basically where they can have a central location in an area that grows a lot of raisins where they can export and process and clean them, group them together and export them and just ship them to Lahore in Pakistan, India or Iran. They'll get five times the normal price for it.

*Q: The other fruit trees, too, were those going to be used primarily for export?*

A: No, those will be local.

*Q: Local consumption.*

A: Either home use or local or both.

*Q: But up until now the people living in that area had not cultivated the fruits?*

A: They had, but just a few people do. Not everybody does and in particular the poorer people, plus they've had seven years of drought and they've just really not been able to start anything new and because of the war a lot of the stuff has been destroyed. They're just kind of getting back on their feet. There are some areas in the river swamps or the river flood plains or stream flood plains where they have some very nice fruit trees. These other areas, some of them will need to be irrigated and in the dryer areas they may have to irrigate that seed for two years to get it to live and to produce, but we found that they took very good care of the fruit trees. It was something they took ownership of so you kind of pick up on those type things as to what's worth investing money into and it will benefit them for a long period of time.

*Q: You were only there for six months, but were you able to personally observe how the farmers took care of the trees, or was that going to be someone else who would be scheduled to observe and evaluate?*

A: The USDA person that followed me, well, he knows, he's got a printout of all that I did and as he gets an opportunity - there again the chances of him just going and looking is probably not going to happen just because of security- but as far as when they're in that area and looking and talking to the people and working through the ministry of AG they can determine what's been done and how well its doing. The needs are so great over there that you just have to start somewhere and you just, you see opportunities and you work on those. If you plan too much ahead you'll be disappointed so you just kind of have to take what you can get and then work that. I was pleased with most of what we did and there's some abuse of it, but you have to be careful what you give away. If there is something that can be sold in the market quite often it will go to the bazaar, so you have to avoid too much seed being dumped in an area or fertilizer or something that is likely to be resold in the bazaar.

*Q: Sure. How long did it take before the trees would bear fruit?*

A: About three years, three to five years.

*Q: So, in the meantime, you mentioned that these farmers do other things and so they would continue doing what they were doing before and they'd be able to spend more time with their trees when they had a harvest I guess?*

A: Correct. A lot of times, it depends on how big their compound was, but a lot of times in their house compound, the mud walls, they would go to the orchard, they call it a garden, that's what they call an orchard. They would have the garden inside those walls so that nobody else picks them. You'd see some that were 30 acres in size that were all walled in. I'm not saying they don't trust their neighbor, but you didn't see many of them that didn't have a wall around them. By being there then the women and children could help take care of those as well, in the watering and the pruning quite often would be women and children involved in that. They took ownership in the trees. They liked the idea of having trees back in the country. The fruit trees at least gets them in the tree planting mode. We had one project with another district where we furnished a water tanker to help them water trees that they planted along the road that goes to the district center and they planted like 6,000 non-fruit trees just for beautification. The dry weather was working on them, but they were making an effort and they were going to go back and try to replant a lot of the ones that died. They were trying.

We also supported some NGOs that were working on some improved wheat variety projects and they requested some assistance with some equipment to support. There were these farm coops with 12 farmers in each coop. We provided tractors and threshers and seed cleaners and equipment to basically farm the land for those 12 farmers, clean the seed or thresh the seed and then clean the seed to sell to their neighbors some improved varieties that would be more productive. Those were very good projects.

*Q: Yes, we have often wanted to pursue the question of relations with different NGOs and you're mentioning that there were some in your region and you worked apparently cooperatively with them?*

A: Yes, ma'm. The biggest problem in Ghazni with NGOs was not us not working with them, but they weren't there.

*Q: They just weren't there.*

A: Well, and I'll give you a little history. One or two years ago, about a year ago, give or take a few months, they had a couple of UN workers there and everybody pulled out. The UN workers got killed and everybody pulled out and basically the NGOs that were working with us were working out of Kabul. They were gradually moving back in, but it heated up again this summer and I'm sure some of them most likely pulled back out again. There again the security is a problem. It slows down the reconstruction effort by not having good security.

*Q: So, the NGOs probably recognized that and were very happy to have the security that*

*the PRT was providing?*

A: As a general rule, yes, but then again, sometimes, it would appear if they were not with us then they didn't seem quite as threatened, but it just depended. It depended on where you were. You can't really answer that question with a good answer because there were so many variables.

*Q: The two UN people you said who were killed, they were killed in Ghazni itself or what was the incident there?*

A: Yes. I don't remember the details, but it was in Ghazni.

*Q: Just to get a sense of the threat to NGOs, were they simply traveling the road and went over an explosive device or were they targeted specifically?*

A: November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2003. UNHCR was shot and killed in the southern city of Ghazni on Sunday. So, he was shot.

*Q: Yes and that's the high commissioner for refugees person.*

A: There have been some problems and we had riots while we were there; there was always something, but you just have to learn from it. Let's see, projects. My brain is sidetracked.

*Q: I can ask you a little bit more about the raisin processing, which I think is interesting, too, because that's a different kind of project. You said it's going to be an export project. Will it be a factory and how many people will it employ?*

A: It will not be a factory. It's basically more of a warehouse type building. It's adjacent to where the ministry of agriculture representative's regional office is so it is kind of in a compound where they already have some agricultural business going on. It's basically a collection point. It will be interesting to see how they fully utilize it, but it's basically a collection point where they bring in grapes and you know, if you bring in 10 pounds of grapes or 100 pounds or whatever, if you bring in X number of pounds of grapes, then they will credit them with it or whether they will pay them for it, the local price and then whenever they export it they give them the money. So, I'm not sure how they will do that; it's for them to work out the details, but there was an NGO, Roots of Peace, that was working with them in the grape business. They were excited about them having this same facility to collect and improve the raisin varieties that they were helping the people to plant in the same area.

*Q: Now, this particular NGO, for example, were they active in Afghanistan before 2001?*

A: I doubt it.

*Q: Probably not. Were they some of the ones who you mentioned were actually working*



*out of Kabul or did they have people on the ground there?*

A: Roots of Peace did not have an office in Ghazni unless it was real recent. They worked to the south primarily. I can't remember where their main office is, but most of them came out of Kabul.

*Q: Okay.*

A: I'm trying to think of the other one that we worked with so much. It's a biggie. If you could name one or two it would probably be one of them.

*Q: I don't really know them particularly. It doesn't matter too much, I'm just trying to get a sense of whether these were foreign workers primarily or some indigenous ....*

A: Usually they would have local Afghans operating it and I'll think of this other one in a minute. They will find somebody in general, not always, but in general, they would have somebody from Afghanistan that was qualified to do whatever they were trying to be doing and that's what we found most of the time. Sometimes they would be from a different country, but usually they would try to have at least part of them be Afghans. They had some people, but the trouble with agriculture in Afghanistan is that there is a big gap, really. From the time the Russians and the Taliban were in control there was no agricultural growth or particularly in agricultural education or extension services, it just ceased to exist. So, you've got people that are in their '50s or '60s that are very well educated, very sharp people that know a lot and then the next group is 18 and 19 years old. So, you've got a 30 year gap or 35 year gap in there that's just lost.

*Q: Were some of the ones in their '50s and '60s trained by USAID back in the '70s?*

A: I'm not sure. They went to Kabul University and I'm not sure. I mean they had agricultural programs back in those days. Just like we worked with a fellow who was the main geneticist that developed a lot of the fruit tree species there, but now he works for, I don't know, rural development or something like that; he's not even in agriculture, and yet he's one of the best.

*Q: At the ministry of rural development?*

A: Yes and they moved him from there to Kabul doing something different. That used to bother me because I'd see these people that were so good with AG and they'd pull them out and have them doing something totally different. I mean he was a sharp fellow. He could have done whatever you wanted him to do, but they really needed him in agriculture.

*Q: The ministry of rural development, I'm not sure what its main mission would be if you have a ministry of agriculture as well..*

A: MRD primarily worked with what we would call here a subdivision; they worked

with the water systems and streets and that type of thing in the villages, particularly in the cities.

*Q: Okay, so it really would be removed from agriculture?*

A: Right. The only time we really did much with them was on water projects. I dealt with water and so I was usually the one that would be the out of town expert.

*Q: Okay. What water projects did you undertake there?*

A: We worked with MRD with some, with the city of Ghazni on some and the NGOs were involved; USAID was involved; it was a big group effort trying to improve potable drinking water primarily, for the people that live there. They have all kind of obstacles. They've got not much rainfall, which means they don't have a real strong water supply, ground water supply. If they go real deep then they tend to get into some arsenic in the Ghazni area anyway. You might pump up something that might kill you.

*Q: This is naturally occurring arsenic?*

A: Yes, it appeared to be. I mean it was down, way down. They have all kinds of obstacles.

*Q: Now, when you're working on that kind of project, is the PRT coordinating with AID? There must be a lead agency or ministry in every one of them?*

A: It just depends on each project. If it was a really big project, then AID would usually be involved. It would probably be to fund an agency.

*Q: So you would be kind of a subcontractor in that?*

A: Yes, the PRT, basically we were just trying to get it done and we didn't care whether USAID paid for it, whether the army paid for it, or who paid for it. We were just in a consultant, or I was in a consultant category, but whether it was a water project or an agriculture tree planting project or whatever it might be, we were there to provide the advice. We didn't do the work. All work was contracted out to the local contractors which there again helped with the employment and hiring the locals. We all worked together. We had the PRT, an AID, Department of State and a USDA representatives, all three of us, we lived side by side each other and we worked side by side each other trying to accomplish the same general goals. All of that under the direction of the PRT commander.

*Q: In terms of funding for the projects that you were undertaking, was it generally adequate and was the stream of funding predictable?*

A: Back up, I want to make sure I get this one right.

*Q: Yes, we alluded to funding a little bit and would you say that for the projects that you were undertaking funding was adequate and was the stream of funding predictable?*

A: Yes and no, how about that? It changed while I was there. I'll have to be careful how I answer this. When I first got there or the first four and a half months that I was there say, the funding, the PRT commander could fund up to \$25,000. The regional commander could fund up to I think it was \$200,000 or \$250,000 something like that, anything bigger than that had to go to Bagram. It really mattered with the local commander having up to \$25,000. We could do a lot of stuff, like fruit tree projects and things where you know, you could make decisions and do them because quite often you just didn't have a lot of time. When you'd see an opportunity and you may not have but four weeks to line up people to have the tree seedlings, to get them out, to get them distributed, the ministry of AG to do his part; you know, with no road system in place, it takes a little while for everybody to do something. The local commander having that ability to fund things made it a lot nicer than it was after that first four and a half months when the military leadership changed and they took all the local authority away from the PRT and the regional commander and placed it all in Bagram where nothing could be approved except out of Bagram. That really hampered us at the local level. That's my personal feeling.

*Q: Why do you think they wanted to do that?*

A: I can't really answer that. I have my ideas, but I will not answer that.

*Q: Okay.*

A: We all had our ideas, but you know, nobody is going to put it in writing. I really don't know. I don't know whether that was, I don't know how far down the command that decision was made or how far up the command, but it greatly hampered us doing things at the local level because sometimes you could take a fairly small financial obligation on a project and do a lot of good, get a lot of mileage out of it, but you didn't have three months to wait on finding out whether you get funded or not and waiting for a group of people who don't even ever come to Ghazni and just sit around a computer and decide whether it's worth it or not. I thought the way they had it done to start with was better. I don't know what their ultimate goals were or what or where they were going with that. It was obviously a way of butting the PRTs' head because nobody was able to change that.

*Q: Then it did produce a delay in your operations when that system changed?*

A: Well, it changed from doing small projects where you could work and you maybe could benefit 1,000 people with \$5,000 or \$10,000 to doing just bigger projects just because you couldn't wait long periods of time for the small stuff as a general rule, unless you planned way ahead and it was difficult to plan way ahead when you've got people changing in and out whether it was agriculture or the army of whoever. Spontaneity really meant a good bit over there and I thought the PRT in general had good

relationships with the local people, particularly for the time period we were working in.

*Q: Right, let's explore that a little bit, too. Go ahead.*

A: Let me back up. The main NGO that we worked with that was based out of Kabul, the Afghanistan headquarters is in Kabul, is R-A-M-P: Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Program and its an international organization. You can find that on the Internet. They worked very well with us or we worked well with them, whatever.

*Q: They're international you said?*

A: Yes and no, excuse me, I just happened to see the other one (listed) down here. The name of the organization is ICARDA, I-C-A-R-D-A ICARDA manages the RAMP projects. The RAMP is a post 2001 deal.

*Q: ICARDA stands for?*

A: Hold on. International Center For Agricultural Research in Dry Areas.

*Q: Oh. Interesting.*

A: Their main base is in Syria according to the Internet.

*Q: Really, but it's an NGO?*

A: Yes, it's a big one. It's all over the Asian area anyway. Anyway, their office is in Kabul and we worked with them a lot on RAMP projects and other projects.

*Q: Did you have any kind of role during the elections? I realize that the political officers and State reps and so on obviously were busy in the run up to the elections. Did they draw you in as an observer?*

A: I was not there during the election.

*Q: That's right, you got there only in January.*

A: I was in-between, however, in preparation for this election; let me, and I'm going to spin on this in just a second, but as I said anytime we'd go out I'd try to always go out with the convoys wherever they went. You don't learn anything sitting inside a compound. We always went and we would go in some of these remote areas where they had had some problems, had some insurgents creating problems, burning down government buildings, shooting at people, whatever it might be. You go in there and my job and everybody's job was to try to build relationships. We found a number of opportunities to do things through agriculture, hydroelectric dams, fruit trees, whatever it might be and just getting out and meeting with the people and them seeing that we're not quite what they heard we were and us seeing they're not near as bad as maybe they told

us they were. We had some real good trips. One area that we went into, they had one of these 55 year old or so agricultural fellows I was talking about who was teaching school because he couldn't get a job with agriculture. There again, that's another problem, is finding something that pays. The assistant minister of agriculture might make \$50 a month.

*Q: Not a big incentive.*

A: Not a big incentive. Soldiers made a whole lot more; I don't know what the minister of agriculture made there, probably \$100 or \$150,, and then you wonder why there's corruption and that pretty well, you can figure it out. We were in this one district that is blocked off by snow and it had snow 21 feet deep in the passes. There are only two passes to get in the district from the outside. They have real good areas to grow fruit trees. I was talking to them and this AG fellow was wanting to have a research farm basically in seedling production where they could furnish seedlings to the farmers in the area. I was saying, "well, why don't y'all have fruit trees? You've got stuff just as good as anything else I've seen in Ghazni and yet you don't have but a few trees." He says "we can't get them in here." The tree planting season would be past before the snow would melt where they could get a truck in with seedlings on it. I don't know whether they will get it done, but our plans were to helicopter lift 15,000 or 20,000 seedlings in there next spring so that they can start that farm and not only just plant some on farms, but to take about a third of those trees and set up a research farm where they could continue to grow their own and then they don't have to worry about the outside anymore. We found that out by going and working, when some insurgents had just burned down the district center and we're trying to see opportunities. You learn that by going and sitting and spending a week with the people.

*Q: During the winter, you got there in January and you were describing...*

A: It was cold.

*Q: Yes, it was cold and you had all this snow and that cut down on your mobility.*

A: Travel was limited.

*Q: So, you did have to spend a lot of time close to your base there.*

A: We stayed out a good bit; you were very limited in what you could do. You also got to see what kind of conditions they've got in the wintertime.

*Q: Yes, sure, that's important.*

A: It's all good. You need to see it all. It helped me; of course I'm not from snow country, I live at Myrtle Beach; it was good because we were able to understand a lot of the reasons and saw them do things that made us wonder what they were doing, and there would always be a perfectly logical answer to what they were doing and really right

interesting to see how well they adapted. We helped with some of the irrigation stuff, but for the amount of water they get, they probably manage it as well as any people in the world. They don't get much and they even have systems where they have basically a guard to limit who can use how much water each month.

*Q: They do?*

A: Yes, and limit how many acres they can farm because they know that they will only have a certain amount of water. They've done those things on their own. There are some things we can learn from them, too.

*Q: I bet.*

A: I always learn more than I help with, I think, but it was very fulfilling both ways.

*Q: Now, in an effort to just sum up here, and I know you have the end of your workday approaching, ...*

A: I'll give you a few minutes if you need it.

*Q: Well, thank you, I appreciate that.*

A: I'm not a clock puncher.

*Q: Your carpool doesn't take off without you?*

A: My carpool is my car.

*Q: Good, that gives us a little flexibility, but I 'd like to have your assessment of the extent to which you think the PRT is actually accomplishing its mission and obviously focusing on your side of it. I mean, I wouldn't expect you to evaluate the infantry on their patrols, but since everyone has the same overall goals, you can evaluate how successful they were and then the counterside, what should they do differently in the PRTs?*

A: I think the PRT concept is good. Like I said, I think overall a lot of good is done, particularly when there was a local commander who had control over the funds. Particularly your smaller projects because that's mostly what we did and then USAID or whoever would come in with the big road projects and those type things. Overall I think we did win the hearts and minds and build relationships with the people because we got out and did and the more we got out and did the better it was. The other side of that is the more you get out and do the more apt you are to get blown up, so you need the military there for security. Yet, because you've got the military, you're limited in what you can do. It's kind of a vicious cycle. I don't know which comes first, the chicken or the egg, but you need the military there to survive and yet you're limited because you've got them with you. You just learn not to do projects where it takes intense management. You learn to do things where they can handle it themselves and not need your assistance but

so much in setting it up and a minimum amount of follow up. Overall, I thought the PRTs, our PRT worked very well. We had problems, but I think being out of there now a couple of months and looking back I thought we got a lot done. I do think the negative side was when we lost local control of all the money. Not any, not even a \$500 project could you do without it coming out of Bagram and I thought that was, I just don't like that. I think that greatly hampers doing things that really do affect the people. I don't know what their logic is and they may have a whole lot better idea where they're going than it appeared.

[END OF SIDE]

*Q: What about security? Were you armed yourself?*

A: I was not armed. We had to wear a flak jacket anytime we went out of the compound, out of the PRT.

*Q: A flak jacket and a helmet, I guess?*

A: All the army people had to wear helmets.

*Q: Yes, they would naturally.*

A: Let's rephrase that. All the army people were supposed to wear helmets. A lot of times when we'd get somewhere, the main reason for the flak jacket was for mines in the roads or IEDs in the roads just to help against being blown up and the same thing for the helmets. Once you got somewhere, you really didn't need them. A lot of times we'd take off the flak jacket when we'd get to wherever we were going. You wear 30 pounds on you all the time and you kind of get ready to get that thing off.

*Q: Sure.*

A: No, I was not armed.

*Q: You mentioned relations with the local people and when you were meeting local leaders and ministry officials, had they had much experience dealing with Americans before?*

A: In general, no. Other than since 2001. Your higher ups, like the district governor, most of them were former Mujahidin or warlords or commanders of some sort so I don't really know exactly how much they had. Generally, they could speak pretty good English and they may have had more exposure, but when you came below that level generally, no. I would say very few had experience with Americans unless it just happened to be a rarity that they had been in the States for some education or something, but that would have been rare.

*Q: I would think that would have been pretty rare, and so when you're thinking how the*

*local people reacted to you, you thought they reacted positively?*

A: I think in general, and here we kind of always use these numbers whether they're accurate or not I don't know; they were just our opinion. There you've got 95% of the people that are good people and you've got about 5% that are bad and they work real hard at being bad. That's probably a pretty good number. In some regions of the province it may be a little bit different ratio, but there were some areas where you didn't have to worry at all. You'd get to know people and we just had no trouble with them, but you get closer to Pakistan with the Pashtuns and then business picked up. Nobody would smile at you sometimes. Even in those areas that were bad, once we would be in there with them for a while the more contact we had with them, the easier things got and the more apt they were to turn in somebody that planted an IED. I felt like we had good relations with the people in general and that the people in general appreciated us being there.

*Q: Regarding women. You were in a line of work where I want to say women would be pretty invisible.*

A: Pretty much.

*Q: Even when the fruit trees began producing fruit, would the women be involved in gathering the fruit?*

A: Well, if it's inside their compound, quite often.

*Q: It would be in their compound. So, you wouldn't have met that many women I guess?*

A: No, in fact, the first time a woman spoke to me wearing a burkha I about fell down.

*Q: Yes and what did she say?*

A: She just said "hey "or "hi" or "hello" or something, so, it just shocked me. It was actually at the PRT. We had a medical center that was very well received and that was one of the things they were trying to do away with. That ain't got a thing to do with agriculture, but the medical clinic that they could come to operated four or five days a week and it was very well accepted and it built PR real well. We also did some medical clinics out in the villages in some of the bad areas and man you get to doing doctoring on the women and it helps things. We had either a lady PA or medic in both different groups that we had in there and, boy, that hits a home run even in the bad areas. We mostly saw women in a burkha unless you're in a Hazara area. We went in one school, a girls school that went up to all 12 grades, which was very rare, and actually got to see women's' faces and that was a treat. They had a few women who were up in the ministry of education. One lady was very well educated and spoke pretty good English, but boy she caught the devil. Yes, I don't know whether she is still alive or not. I mean it's that serious stuff. They're trying. The women, they've got a long, long way to go.



*Q: Definitely, yes. Today's newspaper has some pictures of the Afghan elections that just took place. There's one with a line of women who are voting and the first woman in the line is an elderly woman, and her face is uncovered. All of the others are covered in these blue burkhas and I was thinking that I was getting to an age when I could, in Afghanistan, safely uncover my face. It would not be considered a distraction.*

A: Well, in the Ghazni area, it would be doubtful.

*Q: Is that right? Women remain covered even until death, pretty much.*

A: Yes, pretty much.

*Q: Fully covered?*

A: Pretty much. I tell you, have you ever read a book called The Bookseller of Kabul?

*Q: No, is that a good one?*

A: I'm reading it right now, but it will give you an insight to the women, Pashtun women in particular, of Afghanistan. I've learned a good bit and I've read it since I got back, but I've learned a good bit about the women because nobody tells you and some of the "terps" would tell us or the soldiers would tell us, the Afghan soldiers. Having Afghan "terps", we had about 12.

*Q: Afghan "Terps"?*

A: Terps, interpreters.

*Q: Oh, Afghan interpreters.*

A: We call them "terps." Anyway, we learned a lot about the culture through them and built relationships with them real strong and the workers in the PRT hired local workers, some of whom we had really strong relationships with. We had Afghan security guards to help at the gates and the more everybody got to know each other the better the bond was; so it will take time, but it's possible, I think.

*Q: I think from what I've heard that the evaluation of the PRT's work is really overwhelmingly positive. Obviously, we need more time and maybe more intensity. If you had more PRTs, conceivably they could be more effective overall. It's a big country and there's a lot of development work that needs to be done.*

A: Yes. The only, as far as negative sides of it, when I left there were 10 and it just focused on the bad areas and not the good areas, and when I say bad and good these were what we called good areas because you didn't have the threats, the Taliban side of it. They were the underclass and basically those who were persecuted by the Taliban. There were the Shia Muslims and the Sunnis and you tended to kind of, because they weren't

bothering you, you didn't give them any attention. I would laugh; I didn't think that was good.

*Q: I know there's a PRT though in Bamian and that's the Hazara people and they do get some attention.*

A: Right and ours did, but the focus was tending to go the other way. I understand that, too. I say all that to say where we had two provinces, we really only needed one because you can't do two provinces; somebody goes lacking.

*Q: So you would recommend additional PRTs in that sense?*

A: Right.

*Q: Let's see, do you have any final comments here? This has been really interesting and I guess there are similar people in most of the PRTs doing work similar to what you did?*

A: Probably, out of the 17 PRTs, there were USDA people in seven or eight of them and they range anywhere from people who do the same thing I do to people that do nothing but finance type stuff with rural development to veterinarians.

*Q: You didn't work with livestock particularly?*

A: I did some, but that's not my specialty. I'd call one of our vets or somebody on that. I could obviously tell when there were needs and get information and give them general guidance, but no, I didn't do any kind of clinics or determine what the disease was. There is such a big void in agriculture and yet its 85% of their country and employment and what people are involved in. It's just a shame that they've gotten so far behind. I used to say the Russians lost a war, but they destroyed the country. There's a lot of truth to that.

*Q: I guess it was a very destructive war that was fought there?*

A: Well, just what they did to the people. I mean they just, they totally took the drive out of the people. Of course, it destroyed a lot of the country physically, but it was what they robbed from the people educationally and culturally and socially, and economically, and the Taliban just kind of put the icing on the cake.

*Q: Yes. I'm hopeful that Afghanistan is going to be a real success story for us.*

A: I hope so. It'll take a while.

*Q: It will take a while, a generation at least. But, at the end of 30 years, if we can point to a society that's stable and where economically they've progressed quite noticeably, that will be a success.*

A: Yes ma'm.

*Q: Anyway, I thank you for your service there and also for your help this afternoon.*

A: Sure.

*Q: And I wish you continued good success there with your work in agriculture.*

A: Yes, me, too.

[END SIDE]

[END TAPE]

[END INTERVIEW]

After the interview, the interviewee added by email:

"One thing I will add to the interview is the need for more focus on agriculture, with 85% of the nation dependent upon it for income. Rather than being a "side item" in the process, it should be a "main menu item" - with more guidance from USDA representatives as opposed to "non-ag" agencies or representatives. USDA has no funds over there, and no separate funding for our salaries while there, which results in a lack of support from our agencies at the state level who pay our salaries."