

Concern USA

Reconstruction & Agricultural Rehabilitation Project

North East Afghanistan

Final Report to OFDA

July 2003

1 Executive Summary

Organization:	Concern Worldwide	Date:	23 July 2003
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Program Title: **Reconstruction & Agricultural Rehabilitation**
Grant No.: **HDA-G-00-02-00051-00**
Country: **Afghanistan**
Disaster/Hazard: **Complex political emergency; drought; population displacement**
Reporting Period: **15 December 2001 – 15 March 2003**

Objective # 1: This objective was achieved through the procurement of 472 MT of wheat seed and subsequent distributions to 8,748 beneficiary farmers; the distribution of 19,713 agricultural tools; the planting of over 137,000 fruit and tree saplings; the vaccination of 4,917 livestock; the establishment of two agricultural nurseries; the provision of irrigation for 39,000 ha of agricultural land; and the repair of 51km of irrigation canals.

Resources (OFDA figures only):

Budget for Objective #1:	\$979,678	Expended this period:	\$261,075
Total Expenditure to Date:	\$904,668	Balance:	\$75,010

Objective # 2: This objective was achieved through the repair of 548km of rural roads; rehabilitation of 11 rural bridges, 1 wash, and 2 projection walls; the building and repair of 72 wells, 20 springs, and 1 reservoir; and the rehabilitation of 7 primary schools.

Resources (OFDA figures only):

Budget for Objective #2:	\$757,640	Expended this period:	\$18,467
Total Expenditure to Date:	\$757,480	Balance:	\$160

2 Program Overview

2.1 Goal & Objectives

2.1.1 Goal

To improve food security, provide livelihood support and contribute towards the stabilization of war-impacted communities in 12 districts in the provinces of Badakshan, Takhar, Kunduz and Baghlan.

2.1.2 Objectives:

Objective #1: To implement agricultural rehabilitation thereby improving the capacity of returnees and other vulnerable households to produce or procure a stable and sustainable basket of adequate food. The project will provide livelihood support, reduce the target population's dependency on food aid, decrease the risk of further displacement and raise the capacity of households and communities to use and adequately manage natural and agricultural resources.

Objective #2: To contribute towards the stabilization of war-impacted communities and to facilitate the reintegration of returnees through the spot reconstruction/rehabilitation of houses, community buildings, and other infrastructure to pre-crisis quantities and quality.

2.2 Target Population & Critical Needs

The target population was 305,000 beneficiaries¹ in twelve districts in the provinces of Badakshan, Takhar, Kunduz, and Baghlan. The beneficiary total includes the host population and returning IDPs & refugees, and is comprised of men, women, and children.

The program exceeded its target by 183% as 559,242 individuals benefited. This includes 69,894 direct beneficiaries – representing 16% of the target districts' population – and 489,348 indirect beneficiaries – representing 114% of the whole population².

2.2.1 Critical needs

The program identified critical needs through food security assessments, rapid rural assessments, and detailed consultations with target communities. Main needs identified were (i) emergency food aid (including complementary and supplementary feeding), (ii) seeds, fertilizer, and agricultural tools, (iii) potable water, (iv) road repair (v) schools (including girls' schools), (vi) clinics (vii) shelter, and (viii) economic diversification/off-farm income generation opportunities³.

Through this program Concern was able to address many of these needs, whilst some were outside the scope of the grant.

¹ The proposal did not breakdown the target population into direct and indirect categories.

² The indirect beneficiary total exceeds the total population as many beneficiaries benefited from both objectives. In addition, Concern considers the population at large to be indirect beneficiaries of road rehabilitation projects, thereby making the indirect beneficiary total extremely high. It is not possible to disaggregate those that benefited solely from each objective.

³ These needs are not ranked in priority and represent a consolidated overview of the needs found from all the assessments.

The following assessments were central to the design of the program:

Table 2.1 Program assessments undertaken			
Dates	Assessment	Location	Comment
July 2001	VAM	Area-wide	
Aug/Sep 2001	Nutrition & Food Security	Jurm, Khost wa Fareng	Incomplete due to insecurity
October 2001	Rapid Rural/Food Security	Khoja Ghar	
December 2001	Food Security/Nutrition	Rustaq	
June 2002	Food Security	Farkhar, Khoja Ghar, Rustaq, Warsaj, Khost wa Fareng, Jurm	
July 2002	VAM	Area-wide	
Throughout program	Technical and engineering	Area-wide	For each project

2.2.2 Beneficiary selection

The program used three sets of criteria to select program beneficiaries. Districts were selected using WFP's 2001 VAM report, which identified (what it considered to be) the most food insecure districts in the region. Despite the noted shortcomings of the VAM methodology, but given the lack of a credible alternative method for selecting districts, Concern was guided by the VAM results in choosing its districts. However, the VAM designated some food insecure districts as being secure – notably Farkhar and Warsaj – decisions that Concern and other agencies successfully countered.

Within districts, villages were selected using criteria that varied with the particular intervention planned. For FoodAC interventions under objective two, almost all villages in target districts were served. Once large-scale FoodAC distributions were cancelled in June 2002 and replaced by targeted FFW, Concern prioritized based on the results of rapid assessments and food security assessments conducted in mid 2002. These assessments collected data on number of returnees, access to irrigated and rain-fed land, numbers of livestock, off-farm income sources, access to and distance from key services (health, education, market) and basic dietary habits. Community development staff then analyzed the data to develop a list of priority villages in each district, in which programming was concentrated.

In some – but not all – of these villages Concern initiated a process of developing *shuras*⁴ to act both as program implementation vehicles and as nascent CBOs for potential capacity development at a later stage. As described in later sections, *shuras* facilitated greater contact between program staff and beneficiaries, greater understanding of local conditions, and greater transparency around individual beneficiary selection.

Within *shura* villages, *shura* members did the bulk of the work in deciding which individuals should benefit from FFW, seed distributions, and other input provisions. Community development staff guided *shura* members through a PRA process that included wealth ranking. This allowed committee members to rank the poorest farmers *vis-à-vis* other

⁴ Though formal definitions differ widely, in the context of this program a *shura* is a publicly elected body in a village mandated to liaise with Concern on projects to be implemented in that village. Separate male and female *shuras* were established in Jurm (8 villages, hence 16 *shuras*), Farkhar (5 villages), Warsaj (5 villages), and Rustaq (5 villages).

farmers, especially vulnerable households, and so on. With crosschecking by program staff, this proved an excellent method of targeting the poorest.

Program staff quickly found out, however, that working solely with *shura* villages was culturally and politically impossible. Some target villages could only be accessed via non-*shura* villages, whose population saw program staff and resources come and go on a regular basis. In an area used to blanket food aid, targeting was very difficult for many communities to understand and accept. National staff also found it difficult to accept this targeting modality. The program decided to include non-*shura* villages in the vicinity of *shura* villages as a compromise. While this diluted the targeting somewhat, it is important to remember that differences of poverty level and need between villages often varied only slightly, and that within those additional villages, Concern staff had a large role in individual beneficiary selection. However, the lack of *shuras* in these villages led to problems identified in later sections.

2.3 Geographic Location

The program targeted seven districts in three provinces, as opposed to the twelve districts in four provinces planned. Concern decided not to become operational in Kunduz (Dashti Archi district) as many INGOs were already working there; operations in Chal and Nahrine were funded from other grants⁵; and lack of capacity prevented plans to program in Darayeem and Yaftal (Badakshan). Beneficiary totals are summarized in Table 2.1 overleaf and detailed comprehensively in Appendix One.

⁵ Concern's operations in Chal were funded through OFDA Grant HAD-G-00-02-00023-00 and operations in Nahrine were funded by Ireland Aid (Irish government)

Table 2.1 Beneficiary summary by district

District	Population ⁶	Objective One (direct beneficiaries)	Objective Two (direct beneficiaries)
Badakshan			
Jurm ⁷	76,072	5,124	10,404
Baghlan			
Khost wa Fareng	48,017	1,203	1,700
Takhar			
Farkhar	37,659	1,009	14,807
Kalafghan	30,753	1,285	4,703
Khoja Ghar	66,253	1,269	6,954
Rustaq	139,628	3,383	9,143
Warsaj	29,566	250	8,660
TOTAL	427,948	13,523	56,371

3 Program Performance

3.1 Program Performance

3.1.1 Actual Accomplishments (Objective One)

Halting displacement & migration: The project contributed towards the stabilization and normalization of host and returned populations in the critical post-conflict and post-drought period. Whilst the target population was heavily dependent on food aid for immediate needs during the first half of the grant, the provision of agricultural inputs such as seeds and tools was a vital incentive to vulnerable populations to remain in their communities, and to displaced persons to return.

Revitalizing agricultural production: The project made a significant contribution towards increased agricultural production in vulnerable communities, particularly those without irrigation. The primary modality used was the distribution of wheat seed, tools, and fertilizer⁸ to poorer farmers in isolated villages. The project distributed seed for the spring planting (305 MT) and the winter planting (167 MT) cycles, using quality seed procured within the region. The lack of systematic post-harvest monitoring systems precludes a quantitative impact assessment of the spring wheat distribution; however, anecdotal and incidental reports suggest that insufficient rain and some sub-optimal germination rates caused the intervention to have moderate impact across the program area, and minimal impact in some specific districts, where the crops failed. In one such district – Khost wa Fareng – Concern distributed emergency food aid to counteract the poor harvest, while in another – Rustaq – Concern implemented a complementary food aid project for those most affected by food insecurity, women and children.

Climatic conditions for the winter planting cycle were much more favorable, and a bumper harvest is expected in July and August. Project staff undertook post-distribution monitoring

⁶ Population figures are taken from the WFP VAM Report 2001/2.

⁷ Jurm is the official name of the district that includes Khosh.

⁸ OFDA funds were not used to purchase fertilizer.

that showed that the majority of recipients had planted the wheat⁹, and impending post-harvest monitoring is expected to show excellent results. Agricultural extension officers report that the program seed will produce a yield up to twice that of local varieties. The effects of a good harvest are many: increased quantities of quality seed available in food insecure communities; reduced need for emergency food aid; increased resources to pay back debts from previous years; and increased seasonal work opportunities. A potential negative outcome of the good harvest is the anticipated low market price for wheat – while this will enable the urban vulnerable and other non-agricultural populations to procure this aspect of the food basket, it will not favor those farmers relying on high prices to pay off heavy debts.

Targeting of vulnerable farmers: The program made an enormous effort to target agricultural inputs at poorer farmers. Through a combination of food security assessments, community consultations, and the use of various wealth-ranking tools, Concern staff ensured that poorer districts, villages, and individual beneficiaries were the prime recipients of agricultural inputs.

Decreased dependency on food aid: The program has contributed to massively decreased dependency on emergency food aid in the northeast. Whilst it is not possible to isolate the program's contribution from other, external factors (such as the relative peace enjoyed in the northeast), the good winter harvest will further lessen the need for expensive and time-consuming emergency interventions. By the end of the program, Concern only needed to implement one food aid project in the entire program area.

Addressing the causes of chronic food insecurity: The program has developed two agricultural nurseries that will assist in combating the causes of long-term food security. The nurseries will act as sources of a wide variety of seeds and saplings for farmers and other beneficiaries, with the objective of diversifying crops, combating environmental degradation, and improving growth practices. By the end of the program, over 137,000 seeds and saplings had been planted for a range of crops including apricot, mulberry, walnut, apple, tomato, peach, carrot, watermelon, and orange. In addition to diversifying agricultural output and local diets, the nurseries can also be used to counteract environmental degradation and support watershed management (through the planting and distribution of tree saplings), and as centers to test appropriate technology (such as drip irrigation systems). Concern will continue to develop the nurseries in its new OFDA grant.

Repairing agricultural infrastructure: The program rendered over 39,000 ha of agricultural land reusable through the repair of irrigation canal systems. These systems had deteriorated due to war damage and lack of repair (as the nearby population was displaced). By cleaning irrigation canals, deepening channels, and installing check dams and sluice gates, the program gave beneficiary farmers the ability to control water access to their land¹⁰, which reduces their vulnerability to inadequate or late rainfalls.

3.1.2 Constraints & weaknesses (Objective One)

Beneficiary selection: Though the program was largely successful in accessing its target group of poor, isolated, and vulnerable beneficiaries, there was difficulty in defining and

⁹ Some beneficiaries sold the wheat seed, indicating that they (a) did not need it or (b) had pressing debts that required immediate repayment.

¹⁰ The program was careful not to rehabilitate irrigation canals in poppy growing areas, such as Jurm district of Badakshan.

accessing them in some villages. This partly relates back to the large-scale food distributions of 2001 and early 2002, where almost the entire population was considered vulnerable and received food aid. Many communities had difficulty accepting that aid – including the provision of seeds and tools – was now to be targeted at a percentage, when the overall perception was that everyone was equally vulnerable (or at least sufficiently vulnerable to deserve assistance).

In villages where Concern programmed with *shuras*, these difficulties were negated somewhat through the active participation of community mobilizers sufficiently skilled to explain the concepts of wealth ranking, coping mechanisms, and so on. However, many target villages had no *shura*, forcing the program to rely on technical agricultural staff and village elders to interpret and adhere to beneficiary selection guidelines. Three types of variation from the agreed modality occurred. Firstly, some villages went through the motions of selecting vulnerable groups to receive aid, and promptly re-distributed the inputs after the distribution. Secondly, some program staff did not understand or disagreed with the selection criteria and joined with the elders to distribute the inputs to those farmers considered having the best chance of growing a good crop¹¹. Thirdly, some program staff were unable to resist severe pressure to assist as many people as possible, or particular individuals (such as relatives). Such issues are not unique to this program, and highlight the difficulty of targeting in emergencies and in Afghanistan as a country. It also highlights the necessity of having appropriately trained staff, a resource in very short supply due to the disruption to the education system over the past 23 years.

Accessing vulnerable females: The program had planned to access female beneficiaries through the development of kitchen gardens and the provision of support to food processing and marketing. This did not happen to any notable degree in the program, though Concern has established kitchen gardens using other funding sources. Lack of capacity and time prevented adequate research of opportunities in food processing and marketing. In addition, the cultural restriction on male program staff – both national and international – interacting with women placed an impossible burden on the small number of female program staff. With mounting evidence that women are far more malnourished than men and children¹² in the northeast, the development of skills to access vulnerable women and to design appropriate responses to their situation will be a priority for Concern in 2003/4.

Understanding food security: The program performed activities necessary to attain the immediate objective of rehabilitating the agricultural sector. This was an essential first step towards addressing the underlying causes of chronic food security in the region, which will be a prime focus of Concern in 2003/4; however, the program did not gain as much understanding of local food security systems as was anticipated during this initial rehabilitation phase, though this did not detract from attainment of the objective. The main reasons were lack of data and lack of national staff skilled in food security. Two decades of war had prevented any detailed and comparable study of food security in the northeast, a gap that has still to be rectified. Though Concern's food security assessments and inter-

¹¹ It appears that these staff placed more importance on achieving the highest yield possible than on targeting those most in need. These technical staff believe that poorer farmers are insufficiently skilled to grow the seed properly, thereby "wasting" it.

¹² The results of Concern's complementary food aid project in Rustaq shows that women take the smallest share of food in the household (favoring their children) and thus have a global acute malnutrition rate of 28%, compared to 7.3% for children.

agency data collection exercises like the VAM survey provided some very useful information, the absence of baseline data and sufficiently detailed and credible information on local seed varieties, coping mechanisms, intra-household food consumption patterns, off-farm income sources, and other factors affecting food security has retarded efforts to address the underlying causes of food insecurity. This gap is being addressed in 2003 by the development of the National Livelihoods, Food Security, and Nutrition Surveillance System and the presence of FEWS, with whom Concern plans to cooperate closely.

Countering environmental degradation: The program was unable to allocate sufficient resources to counteracting the considerable and potentially catastrophic environmental degradation apparent across the target area. Specific issues such as soil erosion, deforestation, and improper water resource management pose a serious threat to food security, and to economic growth in general. Though conscious of their relevance, the program did not have the capacity to investigate the extent of these issues nor to initiate appropriate programs to counteract them. Though the two nurseries developed as part of the program will have an environmental aspect to them, further work in this general area is required.

3.1.3 *Success stories (Objective One)*

Winter seed distribution: Though the harvest has just begun, all indications point to a bumper crop that will contribute significantly to food security for vulnerable people in 2003/4. Despite the beneficiary selection difficulties noted above, the program accessed several thousand vulnerable and isolated households whose immediate future depended on having a good crop. Now that that crop is assured, overall livelihood security will be improved, pressure to displace, migrate, or enter into further debt will be lessened, and seeds for the next harvest will be more easily available.

Programming in co-operation with *shuras*: Concern is the only agency in the northeast to actively promote *shuras* as vehicles for ensuring democratic, inclusive, and accountable programming decisions. By having representative committees of both men and women, villages with *shuras* are better able to participate in relevant aspects of program management, and can take upon themselves a decision-making role otherwise filled exclusively by local elites or aid organization personnel. As noted above, Concern successfully programmed agricultural inputs using *shuras* to select qualifying beneficiaries. The selection process is done in public, and is fully open and transparent, greatly reducing the possibility of inaccurate targeting or fraud. Meetings with *shura* members also allow program staff greater access to the target group and facilitate more meaningful communication. A recent external review¹³ of Concern's approach to community development commended the *shura* model and advocated continued support for them, with a view towards developing more formalized CBOs. Concern will consider this possibility very seriously during its upcoming strategic planning process.

3.1.4 *Unforeseen circumstances (Objective One):*

Recruiting qualified national staff: As referred to above and as noted in interim reports, the program had great difficulty in finding well-qualified national staff in the food security sector. From its initial concentration on food aid distributions, the program had staff with great logistical skills available to it, a very important factor in ensuring that food aid was

¹³ Mal Simmons & Moira O'Leary (2003) *Strategic Review of Concern Afghanistan's Approach to Community Development*, p. ii. A copy of the report is available if required.

delivered on time to where it was needed. However, the program did not have either the quantity or caliber of national staff aboard to roll out the planned food security program, as described in the proposal. Staff with these skills were either already working for NGOs with a long history in agricultural development (and thus not inclined to leave programs that they had a central role in developing), unwilling to relocate to the northeast from Kabul or Pakistan, or just not available. This difficulty was not foreseen at the beginning of the program, but was rectified as qualified staff returned to Afghanistan and others were released by those agencies scaling down their programs.

Recruiting international staff: The corollary of not being able to secure qualified national staff was the need to recruit additional international staff for both management and technical advisory positions. During the initial stages of Concern's emergency response (September 2001 – March 2002), emergency response staff from the agency's in-house roster of emergency personnel filled these positions. Recruitment difficulties¹⁴ caused some key positions to go unfilled for some time, causing overwork for all staff and reducing the overall capacity of the program (with results described in the previous section). An independent review of Concern's operations during the emergency notes that that program operated with about half the optimal number of international staff¹⁵ – while additional staff were recruited for the latter half of this program, there were clear shortages at the start that shaped the direction that the program took later on.

3.1.5 Actual accomplishments (Objective Two)

Supporting the delivery of food aid: Objective two was centered on the rehabilitation of community infrastructure through a variety of modalities including food for asset creation (FoodAC), food for work (FFW), and cash for work (CFW). Under WFP's FoodAC modality, the primary goal was to provide food *with asset repair being of secondary importance*¹⁶. This modality was terminated in mid-2002, after which WFP made available FFW for VAM-defined food deficit areas. Concern successfully advocated for FFW for food deficit areas that the VAM incorrectly defined as being food secure. In areas where acute food security was no longer a major problem, CFW was used. This is in line with accepted best practice and follows the recommendations of an internal review of Concern's participation in the FoodAC program¹⁷. An external evaluation of that same participation noted that Concern counteracted pressures for distress migration, provided essential food aid in a timely and appropriate manner, reduced sale of household assets, and rehabilitated essential community assets¹⁸. The successful delivery of over 11,000 MT of food aid constitutes a significant

¹⁴ In common with other agencies, Concern had far more problems in recruiting longer-term staff for post-emergency operations than it had in recruiting for the emergency itself. The agency was also recruiting for Pakistan and southern Africa emergencies at the same time, which lessened the availability of staff that the agency could usually call upon. Finally, it took time to recruit international female staff, as security and cultural constraints had to be fully investigated.

¹⁵ Nicholas Crawford & Paul Harvey (2002) *Forgotten Crisis and Swift Response: an Evaluation of Concern Worldwide's Emergency Operations in Afghanistan September 2001 – April 2002*, Para. 34, p.15. A copy of this evaluation is included with the report.

¹⁶ WFP Afghanistan, *Food Distribution for Asset Creation – Guidelines*, July 2001. FoodAC acted as a replacement for free food distributions, and generally encouraged community participation in the aid process.

¹⁷ Paul Sherlock (2002) *Review of FoodAC Program in Northeast Afghanistan 2001 – 2002*, pp.7-8. A copy of this evaluation is included in the final report.

¹⁸ Crawford & Harvey *op. cit.*, pp. 21/22

achievement for Concern and for this program¹⁹, and is perhaps the main accomplishment of this objective. Total FoodAC and FFW distributions are noted in Table 3.1 overleaf.

Table 3.1 Summary of FoodAC and FFW assistance to drought-affected districts

Targeted district (percent of population targeted)	No. of villages	No. of beneficiaries; duration of assistance	Tonnage (mt) and source of wheat	Tonnage (mt) delivered
Khost wa Fareng (80 %)	155	63,500 over 8 months;	4,752 (WFP)	3,491
Rustaq (60%)	130	100,000 over 5 months	4,185 (WFP)	4,036
Kalafgan (80%)	28	30,000 over 8 months	1936 (WFP)	1,475
Warsaj (60%)		20,000 over 5 months	1,000 mt. for both districts (Concern purchase)	1000 mt for both districts
Farkhar (60%)		30,000 over 5 months		
Khosh	37	8,500 over 3 months	509 mt (Concern purchase 193 mt; WFP 316 mt)	509 mt
Rustaq/Khost wa Fareng		FFW projects	500 mt (Concern purchase)	500 mt
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>500</i>	<i>252,000</i>	<i>12,882</i>	<i>11,011²⁰</i>

Rehabilitation of community infrastructure: Notwithstanding the secondary importance attached to it under FoodAC, Concern succeeded in rehabilitating a significant amount of infrastructure during the program. Full details of rehabilitated assets are noted in Appendix Two, and are summarized in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2 Assets repaired under Objective Two²¹			
Roads (km)	548	Schools	7
Bridges	11	Wells	72
Washes	1	Springs	20
Protection walls	2	Reservoirs	1

As the table illustrates, road rehabilitation dominated objective two activities. Keeping roads open and building new roads to previously inaccessible villages represents another important accomplishment of the program. Rehabilitation of the main Taloqan-Faizabad road, in which Concern participated with several other agencies, allowed the road to remain passable throughout the year, thereby facilitating trade and market access. It also allowed WFP to transport significant quantities of food aid to remote districts of Badakshan province, which would have been impossible without the road. Within Badakshan, Concern made massive improvements to 26 km of the Khosh-Jurm road that provided year round access to markets, schools, and clinics for over 15,000 people. Similar impact was achieved in Rustaq (288 km), Kalafghan (109 km), Khost wa Fareng (38 km), Warsaj (53 km) and Farkhar (40 km). While

¹⁹ WFP rated Concern as an “excellent” FoodAC partner in its 2002 review, one of only 6 of 16 partners to receive this highest rating.

²⁰ WFP was unable to deliver all contracted food, resulting in the lower distribution figure.

²¹ At the end of the grant a small proportion of the stated assets required some completion work. These included 26 km of road, one protection wall, three schools, and one reservoir system.

this impact alone is impressive, further benefit will be derived when economic activity increases.

Improving access to clean water: Water quality is generally poor in Afghanistan and in areas without potable water supplies, illnesses such as diarrhea, dysentery, and scabies are common. Concern built or rehabilitated over 90 water supply systems under objective two, including wells, springs, and reservoirs.

Improving access to education: The program rehabilitated seven schools under objective two, improving education access for over 4,000 children. Only schools with teachers and support from the Ministry of Education were selected.

3.1.6 Constraints & weaknesses (Objective Two)

Beneficiary selection: As with objective one, the program was largely successful in targeting poor and vulnerable people for inclusion in FoodAC and FFW projects. However, both the internal and external review noted that re-distribution was common, thereby reducing the impact of the projects on the target group. Extensive monitoring by Concern staff ensured that the most vulnerable individuals – including female-headed households and the elderly – benefited as planned, but re-distribution certainly did occur on a large scale. The internal review of the FoodAC program recommended greater awareness raising in target communities²² as a tactic to counteract re-distribution; while this would have had some benefit, it would have been impossible to conduct extensive awareness raising exercises in over 500 dispersed and isolated villages, whilst ensuring that food was delivered on time. Even though the northeast should not see large-scale food distributions again, the problem of effective targeting remains an unresolved issue.

Maintenance of roads: Concern is satisfied that the quality of road repair is generally high, when the overwhelming reliance on unskilled labor and absence of heavy machinery²³ is taken into account. It is inevitable that quality will degrade as successive winters take their toll, with flash floods from snowmelt being particularly damaging. Such flooding has already damaged repaired roads in Jurm, Kalafghan, and Khost wa Fareng. While it is understandable that government and local communities would turn to the implementing agencies to undertake repairs, INGOs are not equipped to continuously repair the road network. Responsibility for that function rests with the Ministry of Public Works; however, their capacity to fulfill their mandate is limited. Lack of attention to the maintenance issue can be considered a general weakness of the aid effort, and should be addressed as a priority issue for 2004. To that end, Concern is working closely with MoPW in Faizabad to develop a road maintenance capacity building program that would go a long way to solving the issue.

Lack of national standards: The program had trouble in building new schools, as there were no national standards in place to guide technical planning. Local Ministry of Education officials said that, until standards were agreed, individual school plans had to be submitted to

²² Sherlock *op. cit.*, p. 6.

²³ Concern decided not to deploy machinery on its road rehabilitation projects. Even though machinery would have improved quality, it would have lessened the need for community input and labor, thereby reducing the quantity of food required, and undermining the objective of the FoodAC modality.

MoE HQ in Kabul for appraisal. This would have led to interminable delays²⁴; to counteract this, Concern concentrated on repairing existing structures (to which the national standards were not to apply), and reached agreements with local government and MoE officials where new structures had to be built. Even though this constraint was beyond the control of the program, it did lessen the level of involvement in school repair.

3.1.7 Success stories (Objective Two)

Programming with shuras: As with objective one, the program implemented some objective two projects through *shura* organizations. The Saqaba reservoir project in Rustaq represented the first major asset repair project in which community representatives have been centrally involved in design and implementation. This was a notable success for Concern, as it was difficult to secure the active cooperation and participation of all sections of the community, especially women, in such projects. Members of the female *shura* advised Concern's engineering staff on the most appropriate location of a reservoir and tapstands for them, and on how best to approach the issue of access. Though such consultations were time consuming, they helped ensure that the resultant intervention had a high level of community ownership and participation, and was responsive to the wishes of all sections of the target population.

Increased market access: The program improved market access and economic performance across the region by linking towns and villages to each other with vehicular roads. While it is difficult to separate the impact of improved road access from other factors, it certainly has had a positive effect on trading levels and on prices. Concern staff collected data for Mashtan village, Farkhar district, which was linked to the market center of Khonaqa in Warsaj district. Staff noted a halving of wheat prices (only 20% of which was attributable to the harvest), a general reduction of transport prices and increase in transport links (vans, buses, etc.) and higher attendance at markets. In addition, the road facilitated onwards access to Taloqan hospital; before the road was rehabilitated patients had to endure an uncomfortable (and potentially dangerous) journey by truck.

3.1.8 Unforeseen circumstances (Objective Two)

Recruiting qualified national staff: As with objective one, the program had difficulty in securing sufficient numbers of qualified national staff. This refers particularly to engineers, for whom there was a very high demand (most agencies were involved in some sort of reconstruction work during 2002) and of whom there were very few qualified and experienced individuals. Concern had to rely on international engineers to fulfill key design and planning functions, while national engineers oversaw implementation. Attempts to recruit senior national engineers proved difficult, as educational qualifications were notoriously difficult to crosscheck and the term "engineer" is used as a term of respect for anyone with notable technical skills, but not necessarily an engineer *per se*. This caused unavoidable recruitment and implementation delays.

Lack of safe explosives: The program had to delay some road rehabilitation work whilst sources of safe and legitimate explosives were found. Local engineers are accustomed to using explosive material garnered from the plentiful supply of abandoned munitions found almost everywhere. These do not meet Concern's health and safety guidelines; once this practice became apparent to management staff, use of these unstable explosives was halted,

²⁴ Some INGOs who took this route have noted extreme delays, competition between units and individuals within the ministry and allegations of requests for bribes.

staff were trained in the safe use of explosives by an external ex-military consultant, and explosives were contracted from a registered supplier in neighboring Tajikistan.

3.2 Lessons Learned

3.2.1 *Strengthened Program Planning*

The lesson: Initially program implementation proved challenging in Afghanistan's difficult operational conditions. The program could have benefited from strengthened program management and planning tools to assist with pre-empting problems, such as implementation capacity constraints and recruitment bottlenecks.

Learning: Concern Afghanistan now has a cyclical program planning process in place, whereby field-level managers develop mini-proposals for their areas that are agreed at senior management- and HQ-levels, and which provide a concrete guide to implementation. These Program Area Plans include field-level budgets, thereby giving those implementing projects fairly wide control of their own budgets. These plans are reviewed thrice yearly, allowing changing circumstances to be taken into account.

Supporting these internal programming systems is Concern Worldwide's Project Cycle Management (PCM) System that outlines key tasks, modalities, and stakeholders that should be involved at each stage of the project lifecycle. PCM guides field-level planning and implementation, while having sufficient flexibility to be adaptable to local conditions. HQ does not approve any plans (and, subsequently, donor proposals) unless the PCM system has been followed, thereby acting as an incentive to timely and inclusive field-level planning. This system will be rolled out in Afghanistan during 2003/4.

3.2.2 *Systematic and comparable food security data collection and analysis*

The lesson: The program suffered from a lack of systematically collected, comparable, and analyzed food security data. This forced managers to rely heavily on the results of rapid rural assessments and food security surveys. While the results of these surveys, and the programming decisions made based on them are not in doubt, they did not give a comprehensive or comparable picture of food security across the program area and may have resulted in inaccurate targeting. It certainly made countering WFP's VAM report more difficult, as this survey used a standard methodology across all districts (even if both the methodology and its application were far from perfect).

This deficiency in baseline data was felt by all actors, and given the circumstances there was little that Concern could have done to redress the issue in the lifetime of the program.

Learning: The Ministry of Health is addressing this issue through the development of a comprehensive, comparable, and nationwide assessment system called the Livelihoods, Food Security, and Nutrition Surveillance System (LFNSS). Still at the piloting stage, this system will provide key oversight, methodological, training, and analytical support to those actors involved in food security – including government, UN, and NGO actors. The system is designed to be ongoing (thereby reducing dependence on one-off exercises like the VAM), regionally-analyzed (thereby promoting inclusive as opposed to agency-specific planning), and long-term. Concern has committed itself to participating in this system in 2003/4, and to cooperating with other fora involved in food security, such as FEWS/NET and AREU.

3.2.3 Staff capacity

The lesson: The program suffered from inadequate numbers of qualified and skilled staff. This contributed to the stated problems in program management, implementation, and monitoring. Technical staff – particular agriculturalists and engineers – had little understanding of and variable respect for participatory methodologies of beneficiary selection and project implementation, and sometimes contradicted other program staff and countermanded the results of community consultations and the wishes of *shuras*. More generally, many field-level staff had incomplete knowledge of logistics, transport, and finance systems, greatly increasing the workload of field HQ staff. Whilst recruitment constraints and the enormous pressure to implement are partly to blame, the program's lack of attention to staff training and capacity building is a more central and pressing factor.

Learning: The community development review referred to in footnote 13 proved what program management had come to know during the year – that staff capacity has to be addressed as a pressing issue for the overall country program to maintain its ability to remain a credible and relevant actor in the northeast. In response, important human resource tools are being rolled out (objective setting, performance management, more accurate skills and experience descriptions in job adverts). Concern is also committed to allocating and using significant resources in training key staff in appropriate technical and methodological skills in 2003/4.

Relatedly, Concern is also planning a complete review of field-level staffing structure and management systems in late 2003/early 2004. This review, to be led by an experienced manager from a long-established Concern field, will recommend changes to a structure that was relevant for large-scale food aid distributions, but which is ill-suited to developing and rolling out a long-term program.

4 Resource Use / Expenditures

Concern expended \$1,662,158 of the grant, representing a 95.67% disbursement rate. A comprehensive summary is included at the end of the report. Concern supplemented OFDA funding with funds from Ireland Aid, DFID, ECHO, and private sources, of which c. \$1.5m supported this program. In addition, the monetary value of food aid is estimated at \$6m, giving an indicative program value of c. \$9.1m. Concern Afghanistan's overall 2002 program was valued at c. \$12.71m²⁵.

²⁵ This figure is taken from Concern Worldwide *Annual Report & Accounts 2002*, p. 23 & p.97.

Province	District	Direct Beneficiaries			Indirect Beneficiaries			Population (VAM 2002)	% Directly Assisted	% Indirectly Assisted
		Objective 1	Objective 2	Total	Objective 1	Objective 2	Total			
Badakshan	Jurm & Khash	5,124	10,404	15,528	25,620	78,122	103,742	76,072	20%	136%
	Provincial Total	5,124	10,404	15,528	25,620	78,122	103,742			
Baghlan	Khost wa Fareng	1,203	1,700	2,903	6,015	38,500	44,515	48,017	6%	93%
	Provincial Total	1,203	1,700	2,903	6,015	38,500	44,515			
Takhar	Farkhar	1,009	14,807	15,816	5,045	25,524	30,569	37,659	42%	81%
	Kalafghan	1,285	4,703	5,988	13,873	30,855	44,728	30,753	19%	145%
	Khoja Ghar	1,269	6,954	8,223	26,635	45,430	72,065	66,253	12%	109%
	Rustaq	3,383	9,143	12,526	25,385	130,134	155,519	139,628	9%	111%
	Warsaj	250	8,660	8,910	1,250	36,960	38,210	29,566	30%	129%
	Provincial Total	7,196	44,267	51,463	72,188	268,903	341,091			
PROGRAM TOTAL		13,523	56,371	69,894	103,823	385,525	489,348	427,948	16%	114%

Direct beneficiaries refer to those actually taking part in or receiving inputs from the project. They include labourers, farmers receiving agricultural inputs and tools, and children and teachers attending rehabilitated schools.

Indirect beneficiaries refer to those not taking part or directly receiving inputs from the project, but still benefiting in some way. They include families of labourers and populations of villages where inputs such as irrigation canals, schools, and wells were rehabilitated. For road rehabilitation estimates have been made of the district population benefiting from potential use of the road.