

Documentation

Dataset A4. Interviews on the Drug Economy in Nangarhar and Nimroz provinces

Data collection resulting from 95 face-to-face interviews on the governance context of the drug economy in three border districts in Nangarhar province and three border districts in Nimroz province, Afghanistan. This includes guideline interviews with political, social and economic actors, in-depth interviews with political brokers and their socio-professional networks, and interviews with farmers and traders with a history of involvement in the illicit drug economy at some stage in their lives.

Dataset owner: Organization for Sustainable Development and Research (OSDR)

Context

In Afghanistan, the goal of the Drugs and (dis)order research is to develop a robust and dynamic understanding of the actors, commodities and events that shape the borderlands of Nangarhar and Nimroz. In the initial project years 2018-2019, the focus of research was on cross-border trading relations and field access, and worked around rather than on drugs. During 2020 the focus shifted to the drug economy itself.

These interviews investigate the nexus between the lifeworld of people engaged in the drug economy and dynamic local governance regimes in two border regions of Afghanistan.

The two provinces share some relevant features: each is home to one major official border crossing (Torkham and Milak), and a large number of informal crossings along the border. Both provinces have a history of mostly open cross-border exchanges with their 'tribal' or 'ethnic' kin on the Pakistani and Iranian sides. But over the past 10-15 years these open informal flows have been increasingly restricted by border control regimes implemented by neighbouring states.

The provinces are distinct in terms of their recent governance history and integration into Afghanistan's drug economy. Nangarhar has long been a politically important borderland. Pashtun tribes, whose representatives have often been nationally influential, dominate local politics in Nangarhar. Nangarhar has also traditionally been a site of opium cultivation and trade. Nimroz, by contrast, is a physically and politically remote frontier province bordering both Iran and Pakistan, with a marginalised Baluch minority population residing along the border. Trade flows to and from Iran have ballooned since 2001, and the province has experienced increasing investment and economic growth, particularly in the capital of Zaranj. In comparison to other southern provinces, Nimroz is not a major site of opium cultivation, due to its widespread deserts and lack of suitable agricultural land;. But it has developed into a main 'highway' for illicit smuggling since the fall of the Taliban government in 2001.

Methodology

Guideline questionnaires for interviews have been developed in a SOAS – OSDR collaboration in English and Pashto.

For each of the six districts guideline interviews were conducted with political, social and economic actors, in-depth interviews with political brokers and their socio-professional networks, and three interviews per district with farmers and traders with a history of involvement in the illicit drug economy at some stage in their lives. For the more sensitive drug-specific interviews in each district, three interview partners were chosen based on their access to fertile land (high-yield, medium-yield and low-yield agriculture).

Forty-one guideline interviews were conducted in Nangarhar and 44 in Nimroz. Interviewees were selected from local authorities and community influential people on district level. Local authorities include the District Government, District Development Assembly, Police, Departments of Agriculture, Education, Health, Economy and Huquq (Justice). Community influential people include militia and security commanders, religious leaders, tribal elders and traders.

An additional ten in-depth interviews were conducted with brokers and their networks.

Handwritten responses were noted by the field researchers in Pashto or Dari. Responses were then typed out in Word and later translated to English.

Location

Field work was conducted in Achin, Durbaba and Mohmandara districts in Nangarhar province, and in Charborjak, Kang and Zaranj districts in Nimroz province.

Time period

Field work was carried out during July – September 2020 in Nangarhar and during October - November 2020 in Nimroz.