

Documentation

Dataset A2. Questionnaire interviews with key informants, transporters, traders and officials in Nimroz

30 Sept 2020

Data collection resulting from face-to-face questionnaire interviews with 100 key informants, 103 transporters, 100 traders and one official in Nimroz, Afghanistan. Interviews used bilingual paper forms, in Pashto and English. Handwritten responses were noted by the field researchers in Pashto. Responses were then entered into a MS Access database in English and also converted to MS Excel. The dataset consists of four 4 separate files

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

Context

In Afghanistan, the goal of the research was to develop a robust and dynamic understanding of the actors, commodities and events that shape the borderlands of Nangarhar and Nimroz. While the overall GCRF project focuses on the role illicit drugs play in the transition from war to peace in the borderlands of Afghanistan, Colombia and Myanmar, the research team in Afghanistan decided to widen the scope of this exploratory phase of the research to include the production, trade and movement of several key commodities specific to the area.

The first exploratory phase of the research sought to answer four main questions:

- (i) How does the production and transportation of key commodities, such as minerals, drugs and fuel, impact on the political and economic stability of borderlands?
- (ii) Do these impacts differ depending on whether commodities are (a) illegal or (bi) legal commodities moved illegally?
- (iii) What is the reason for the shifting relative importance of different commodities and transportation routes and how do these relate to changes in economic and political networks and/or violence?
- (iv) Which interventions supported/ undermined the production and transportation of these commodities; what decisions guided their design and implementation; and ultimately how did these interventions effect the political and economic stability of borderlands?

It is important to note that the production, processing and consumption of illicit drugs is just one of a set of activities and means of livelihood in these borderland areas; and often only one of many that are deemed illegal. Therefore, the research adopted an approach that "talked around drugs not about drugs", thereby positioning the illicit drugs economy within broader questions about the livelihoods and the political economy of those living in these border areas and avoiding the kind of direct questions that often lead to the kind of aggrandizement, denial and the levelling of accusations of drugs trafficking at political opponents that has been seen in much of the official and scholarly literature.

Direct and focused questions on the production of opium and cannabis, and particularly the processing and smuggling of opiates is unlikely to yield meaningful data and can expose researchers to considerable danger. It can also lead to a distorted understanding of the importance of illicit drugs within the political economy of the region. To avoid this scenario, establish and strengthen contacts in situ, and develop a clear understanding of the research possibilities for subsequent rounds of fieldwork, this initial phase focused on charting the economic and political

networks that underpin the production, transport and cross border movement of a number of commodities, including drugs, minerals, "transit goods", fuel and fertilizer. With its focus on these particular commodities, the research travels the length of their supply chains, from the official and unofficial crossings along the Afghanistan/Pakistan border deep into the hinterlands where some of these commodities are produced, as well as the locations en route where these, and other transit goods, are stored and traded on both sides of the border. As such, the research is rich in spatial data that can be further developed and strengthened during subsequent phases of the research.

This research focused on a limited number of commodities namely (i) illicit drugs - differentiating between cannabis, hashish, opium, morphine, heroin and methamphetamine; (ii) minerals - in Nimroz, largely marble from Helmand; (iii) diesel; (iv) fertilizer; (v) cigarettes; and (vi) people.

Methodology

Individual interviews were held with all respondents while they were at work, since holding interviews in the household compound can become subject to interruptions. Group discussions were avoided, as they tend to be dominated by community elites, are inappropriate for sensitive issues and increasingly represent a security threat to both respondents and researchers in rural Afghanistan.

Interviews used a structured questionnaire form and responses were noted by the field researchers in Pashto.

Location

An initial selection of potential research sites involved the identification of:

- (i) the major official and unofficial border crossings in Nimroz;
- (ii) the primary points of production for each of the commodities being studied that originated in Afghanistan; and
- (iii) the location of any wholesale markets, with the objective of mapping the supply chains for each commodity.

Once an initial list of locations had been established imagery analysis was conducted to assess the current activity in each site, and where possible to trace supply chains back to further locations that might be of interest. This imagery analysis and then a review of some of the historical data identified several locations where commodities were or had been stored and cross-decked from one form of transport to another. It also provided visual evidence of the changes in infrastructure, the amounts of goods stored and transported over time, and a useful point of reference to follow up during data collection in the field.

Fieldwork was carried out in Zaranj, Guder Noor Mohammad Khan, Guder Teellae, Guder Gul Shah, Guder Darwishook and Guder Makaki of Kang district and Guder Khwajah, Guder Ferozagee, Khwabgah, Lakarry and Milak in Zaranj district of Nimroz province.

Time period

Field work was carried out during March – June 2019.

Sample selection

The focus of data collection was on those involved in the day-to-day activities of extraction, transport and trade of each of the commodities being studied and in each of the research site

identified. To circumvent the inherent problems associated with researching an illegal or underground activity, the data collection focused on household livelihood strategies: how these individuals earned a living and how the circumstances that shaped it had changed over time and why. Most importantly, discussions with respondents focused on their direct experience rather than on events or phenomena over a wider geographic area, where answers become increasingly speculative.

A further focus of this first phase of the research were those categorised as "key informants", individuals who had lived in a particular research site for an extended period of time and had intimate knowledge of the history, political-economy and events that shaped that location. Due to problems of access and the composition of the research team at this stage of the research these respondents were male. To gain as full a history as possible preference was given to those of sixty to seventy years of age, as most recollect back to the time of King Mohammed Zahir Shah in the 1950s and 1960s. The research in Nimroz presented some particular challenges in contrast to Nangarhar in that an increasing number of the villages on the border with Iran and the unofficial border crossings, known locally as guder, had experienced a significant outflow of the population, a function of drought and the impact Iranian border controls had on the informal economy. This meant that many of the original inhabitants of these areas had left, settling in Ziranj, Iran and other areas making it more difficult to develop a detailed history of these locations prior the late 1970s.

Consent procedures

Before field work, the field research team is officially introduced by the ministry of economy to the provincial departments and a MOU is signed with the governor office and other relevant departments on provincial level. Then the team is officially introduced by the Ministry of economy directorate office to the targeted districts and the team meet with each district governor and brief them about the project activities.

Due to the sensitivity of the research subject and to safeguard the safety of respondents, written consent form cannot be used. Oral consent is asked from each respondent, using the following wording:

*Good morning/afternoon Sir,
My name is..... and I am working for the Organization for Sustainable Development and Research (OSDR). We conduct survey/research on the history of the border land. if you don't mind I would like to ask you some questions about the border history, type of trading and type of commodities trading across the border. So I would like to know that how the trading on the border affects the lives and livelihood of the people in this area. My questions will take about 60 minutes of your time. If you are not happy with any question to answer then you have the right of cancellation. If you agree I will start my first question and go ahead for next.*

Anonymisation steps

The data file has been anonymised by using codes for each respondent (instead of names). No sensitive information was collected during the interviews.