

LINKING RELIEF, REHABILITATION AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (LRRD) IN AFGHANISTAN

Is building a city an appropriate response to development issues in Bamiyan?

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Notwithstanding the destruction of the two 1600 year old giant buddhas by the Taliban in 2001, Bamiyan is undergoing tremendous change and has a number of complex issues to deal with regarding its evolution. At this point in time, it seems important to reflect and question the direction that development efforts are taking in Bamiyan, as well their likely impact from a field perspective.

Located in Hazarajat, the central Highlands, "Bamiyan city", 120km north-west of Kabul, is the capital of the Bamiyan province composed of five districts¹. Bamiyan is also a valley sandwiched between two high mountain ranges. This area is probably one of the most mono-ethnic regions in Afghanistan.

As the third largest ethnic group in the country, the Hazarat people, unlike the rest of the Afghan population, are Shiite. This is one of the main reasons explaining their persisting political and socio-economic marginalisation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Hazarat slaves markets still existed. Even before the war, in the 1960s, development in Bamiyan was evolving at a much slower pace than in other provinces. According to many Hazarat people, ethnic discrimination is at the core of sluggish development in this province.

After 25 years of war, almost all the inhabitants of Bamiyan city can be considered to be IDPs (Internally Displaced People). Indeed from the Soviet invasion to the withdrawal of the Taliban in 2001, most of the population of Bamiyan has been forced to flee several times. As a result most of the houses were destroyed on several occasions, livestock and crops confiscated,

especially during the Taliban regime who massacred many Hazarat people just because they were Hazarat.

One of the first difficulties encountered on conducting this study was identifying the limits of what is known as "Bamiyan city". As a matter of fact, Bamiyan city does not officially exist: it has no official boundaries. The inhabitants and local stakeholders define Bamiyan city as a rural area, or at least as a mix of urban and rural areas. The concept of city has no clear significance for the population, or if it does, it is limited to the bazaar. Nevertheless, having consulted various local stakeholders and carried out field visits, the eleven villages closest to the bazaar area (less than 20 minutes by car) have been selected as part of Bamiyan city. These villages are strongly connected to the economy of the bazaar. Yet, for the other villages located in remote areas (up to 1.5 hours from the bazaar) Bamiyan bazaar also represents an important economic hub but their isolated location and lack of infrastructure prevents them from truly being considered as part of Bamiyan city. Hence, in the following article Bamiyan city will refer to the bazaar and its eleven closest villages².

This paper seeks to address the relevance of the design of a master plan for Bamiyan's future development. The study highlights the difficulty in striking a balance between the need to both cope with urgent livelihood issues and allow sustainable development. The situation in Bamiyan is today representative of specific rural/urban linkages. Evidently building

¹ Yakawlang, Panjab, Waras, Shibar and Bamiyan

² Eleven closest villages are represented by a ● on the following map on page 6.

a city conjures up a dream of modernity, a desire to attain a higher level of development. Nevertheless the question remains as to whether the construction of a city is the true answer to enhancing livelihoods in Bamiyan? Furthermore how can development plans both preserve historical and cultural areas whilst also allowing for much needed economic development? Does Bamiyan still need an emergency approach or should stakeholders be looking at adopting a development approach?

This analysis is based on a two-phase survey and field research conducted between July and October 2005³.

What is at stake today in Bamiyan?

The major issues facing Bamiyan city in its current development process include the rapid population growth, weak urban management and lack of infrastructure, as outlined below.

First, *the rapid population growth* is the result of many different factors. Reasonable security levels in the Bamiyan area, the development of the bazaar, the presence of large numbers of NGOs and government offices have attracted many IDPs who are looking for a place to live after 25 years of war and forced displacement. Afghanistan has also had to deal with the return of more than two million refugees who fled abroad during the war. Refugees have returned from Pakistan and Iran⁴ in Bamiyan, sometimes after 20 years abroad.

Secondly, *the development of the bazaar poses a threat for the historical and cultural zones of Bamiyan*. Indeed Bamiyan city has one main focal point, a bazaar consisting of

approximately 1,000 small shops. This bazaar is situated in the valley and forms a street parallel to the holes where the giant buddhas once stood. Around the bazaar there are no houses, as most people live in different villages around the bazaar. Nevertheless some of the city's infrastructure is situated around the bazaar, such as the boy's high school, the hospital and the university. The bazaar has undergone huge development since 2002 when there were only around 50 shops. Every day it attracts more daily workers, especially newcomers who do not own any land. As a result, the bazaar continues to grow. The underlying problem remains that this uncontrolled expansion is taking place to the detriment of agricultural fields and archaeological and cultural areas that have been identified as important sites by UNESCO. This is why UNESCO has proposed a management plan for the conservation of cultural areas in Bamiyan. As a matter of fact, UNESCO is now advocating a freeze in the development of Bamiyan's bazaar.

Another striking element is the *development of new villages of poor landless households, whose existence is exclusively dependent on an already saturated bazaar*. All the newcomers are de facto landless since there is no more agricultural land available today in Bamiyan area. They have no choice but to seek job opportunities in the bazaar. Yet, the bazaar is not capable of absorbing all these new workers. As a result the newcomers are experience enormous difficulties in generating a regular income, and therefore cannot afford decent accommodation. Three new villages⁵ have been created since 2002 and they best represent the changes that Bamiyan city is experiencing today. The first one, Zargaran, is an illegal settlement. It is located on the mountainside between Daudi and Jugra Khil⁶. The mayor regularly sells pieces of land belonging to the Daudi and Jugra Khil people, which is totally illegal. This new village is the one that is undergoing the fastest expansion, since the majority of newcomers have no choice but to settle there. The creation of this village has created major land disputes. Indeed the land that is now occupied by the newcomers was used in the past by villagers from Daudi and Jugra Khil to access the ailoaks. There is no infrastructure in this village and it is probably the poorest in the valley. Many families are landless, and male members of the household try to find work as daily

³ The first part of this survey was carried out between 25 July and 5 September 2005. The second phase was conducted over two weeks from 15 October to 30 October 2005. The first phase of the survey focused on field visits to the villages and interviews with both the chief of the village and a selection of the more vulnerable families among the villagers. Likewise interviews with local authorities: the governor's office, different ministries and the mayor were also conducted. Interviews were also conducted with UN organisations, international and local NGOs working in Bamiyan. The second phase of the study consists in conducting interviews with rich families (12) in four selected villages and selecting a new series of villages (11) located in more remote areas further away from the bazaar. In total 78 families, 22 chiefs of village and thirteen shopkeepers were interviewed over the two phases.

⁴ 5,161 refugees since 2002 (15-20% remain in Iran and Pakistan), 31,000 IDPs since 2002, most of whom have returned.

⁵ Shang Chespan, Zargaran and Mollah Ghollum.

⁶ Name of the two other villages located on the east mountain side

workers in the bazaar. However, as the labour market of the bazaar is every day more saturated the majority is totally jobless.

Two other villages have been officially created by the former governor and built by local NGOs⁷ in 2003: Mollah Ghollum and Shang Chespan. At first the purpose of these villages was to provide accommodation to people living in caves around the giant buddhas. Concerning Mollah Ghollum, located few kilometres away from the buddhas on the west road, half of the eighty houses built in collaboration with NGOs and distributed for free were allocated to government staff and "friends" of the former governor. In Chang Shespan, one hundred houses were distributed in a slightly more official manner and people living in caves were really among the beneficiaries. The origin of the problem is that this village was built on a small plateau and planners overlooked the setting up of water networks. Inhabitants have no means of accessing any water at all in this area. As a result some beneficiaries preferred to sell their house and returned to the cave they occupied previously where there is better access to water.

These two villages were built by the local authorities and all the houses are identical. They have been built and designed on the basis of a plan.

In these three new villages, people are landless and have no livestock. They have no link with rural activities. Apart from Mollah Ghollum where a large proportion of inhabitants work for the government or are teachers, these villages are almost completely dependent on the bazaar economy.

As a result, one of the key issues remains the shortage of land, which accentuates the problem of how to accommodate newcomers, who have to cope with the unofficial land distribution policy or simply the lack of land policy. Political tensions between the governor and the mayor are also part of the problem. The mayor continues to sell land on the mountainsides despite the fact that this is illegal. Moreover throughout the whole valley, no more land available. The governor is currently looking at new available land in Yakawlang to shelter newcomers who are living in caves.

On top of this, in every village visited, people highlighted the importance of access to water as a priority. Agricultural villages are finding it increasingly difficult to irrigate their land. Poor villages situated in the northern part on the mountainside do not have access to drinking water. Originally, some of these people lived in caves, indeed, some of the "houses" barely resemble more than a cave, but a number of single roomed mud huts have been built over the past few years. People either work as daily workers in the fields, or in the bazaar, or both. The majority of the population is made up of small landowners. What they can produce from their plot of land is just enough to cover their needs during the winter season. Many of the IDPs who have returned to these villages are jobless or daily workers in the bazaar.

Several wells have been built in different villages but they are often not in working order. During spring and summer, people take water from rivers and streams despite the fact that they are heavily polluted. At winter time access to water is even more difficult since streams tend to dry up and people are obliged to travel further to collect water, sometimes more than two hours walk. Not every family has a donkey.

Finally, the lack of infrastructure - roads, sanitation, electricity and schools - remains an issue of utmost importance. The road between Bamiyan and Kabul is in really poor condition. The journey often takes more than eight hours and for trucks it is even longer and more dangerous. During winter, most of the roads are closed due to heavy snowfall. Bamiyan is still relatively cut off compared with other regions. There is no network electricity. Only the richest villages have been able to buy a generator. Likewise there is no sanitation system. The majority of parents are willing to send their children to school. There is one boys' high school in the centre of Bamiyan and one girls' high school in Saidabad. Whereas the location of the boys' high school is central, the girls' school is not. Consequently villagers who are living in remote villages are reluctant to send their girls to school since they have sometimes to walk more than two hours on their own to get to school.

In terms of the quality of the infrastructure network Bamiyan has evidently still a long way to go before it can truly be identified as a city, if one considers that a city is defined by its capacity to offer a services network to its inhabitants.

⁷ CAWC and Shuada

Since 2001: a new rural/urban interface

Some of the issues raised above are new and the direct aftermath of the 25 years of war. Indeed before the war, the majority of Bamiyan inhabitants had easier livelihood because they were largely based on agriculture and livestock. However, all cattle owners lost their livestock during the war. Finally, the main aftermath of the war has been the severe impoverishment of the population. Indeed, only big landowners have the capacity to invest in new activities. They live in the southern part of the valley that can be identified as the rich part. The five villages⁸ located in the southern part of the valley are surrounded by fields and have the advantage of easy access to water for drinking and irrigation. These villages are occupied by big landowners (up to 20 jeribs). This is the wealthiest population since they have the financial resources to invest the profits they generate from their agricultural activities in new commercial activities in the bazaar. The southern area is also considered to be the richest since this is where UN organisations, NGOs, guest houses and government offices are located. As a result, some of the people living there are employed as their staff. These employees take advantage of the higher salaries that are offered in comparison to the Afghan average and also invest their money in commercial activities in the bazaar. All the shopkeepers live in these villages and it is only in these rich villages that livestock can be found. Here, before the war there were huge herds of livestock, but people lost their livestock during the war and drought. Since then, very few have chosen to reinvest in this activity. Most households own just few sheep or cows for their own use.

A new element which is worth pointing out is the change in the way people capitalised their wealth in the eleven villages identified as part of Bamiyan city. This change is the result of a combination of different factors. People have been severely traumatised by the war and this continues to influence their choice of livelihood. They are still afraid that the Taliban might return to power. Indeed, if they choose not to reinvest in livestock it is also because they are afraid of losing them again. They would rather invest in activities that are perceived as being less risky. Indeed, they are aware that people who ran a shop before the war, still run their business today and continue to make good profits, whereas those who had livestock before the war have lost everything. Today

⁸ Sadaibad, Sarasyab, Hyderabad, Dasht Essan Khan, Gorwana

they have no means of building up their herds again, which nonetheless represent a source of wealth.

Another reason is that the current system of micro-credit⁹ is not designed for investing in livestock. Hence, it is easier to get credit to invest in small business (shop, car, petrol station) than in livestock due to the terms and conditions attached to the credit. Villagers have to pay back their loan two months after having received it, yet for farmers who invest in livestock, two months is insufficient to generate any profit.

A third and final reason is the change in mentality. People are attracted by what they perceive as being modern, that is to say in Bamiyan commercial activities: opening up a shop, buying a car, etc. Likewise investing in livestock requires long-term investment and hard work whereas new businesses, such as shops, running a car, can generate a reasonable income quickly and are symbols of a more modern lifestyle and of success in the eyes of a population who has suffered of 25 years of war. We may ask ourselves whether in the long term *the bazaar economy may well overtake revenues generated by the agricultural sector?*

This mix between commercial and agricultural activities highlights the need to develop new ways of understanding the rural-urban interface and thus the true reality of Bamiyan today. Using a conventional or Western analysis in order to understand the differences between rural and urban areas may give rise to gross misunderstandings with regard to the Bamiyan reality. The categories used for defining cities and rural areas are no longer applicable. Indeed Bamiyan offers a very specific example of a new rural-urban linkage. It is still difficult to determine whether Bamiyan bazaar and its villages can truly be called a city. Bamiyan is in a transitional phase: it is no longer solely rural but it is not yet a city. Many people's livelihoods are still based on agriculture although since the end of the war, they have shifted towards the growing economy of the bazaar.

⁹ In Bamiyan two NGOs: CHF and AKDN provide loans to people in order to help them to develop income generating activities.

What type of development is most applicable for Bamiyan city? How to preserve historical and cultural areas and promote economic development?

UNESCO has produced a management and conservation plan for archaeological and cultural areas in Bamiyan. The aim of this plan is to put forward recommendations for the future development of these areas. That is to say identifying areas to preserve and others where development could be carried out. UNESCO's objective was not to build a city but only preserve archaeological and cultural areas. Nevertheless the governor of Bamiyan took this plan as an opportunity to develop a master plan to build what she calls a "new city" on the plateau south of Bamiyan. The aim of this master plan is to attract private investment, to receive financial resources from central government according to an agenda based on Bamiyan needs fixed by the master plan and, finally to preserve the archaeological and historical zones (on UNESCO recommendations) by focusing all the investments in one area (on the plateau in the south) far away from the main cultural areas identified by UNESCO.

Protecting Bamiyan's historical values is a top priority for the governor to prevent any further deterioration. It is also essential for Bamiyan's future development. Indeed Bamiyan has a huge tourist potential. This has already started, for example, now one has to pay a ticket to visit the Buddha holes. One solution for "Bamiyan city" development could be the development of tourism. This being said, the importance of finding a balance between preserving the cultural landscape and economic development is even greater.

The need today is to produce a plan that will combine cultural and archaeological conservation and the right of Bamiyan inhabitants to have access to proper economic development. Yet a master plan needs a long-term development outlook whereas the conservation of cultural and archaeological heritage requires short-term action.

Building a city: a dream of modernity

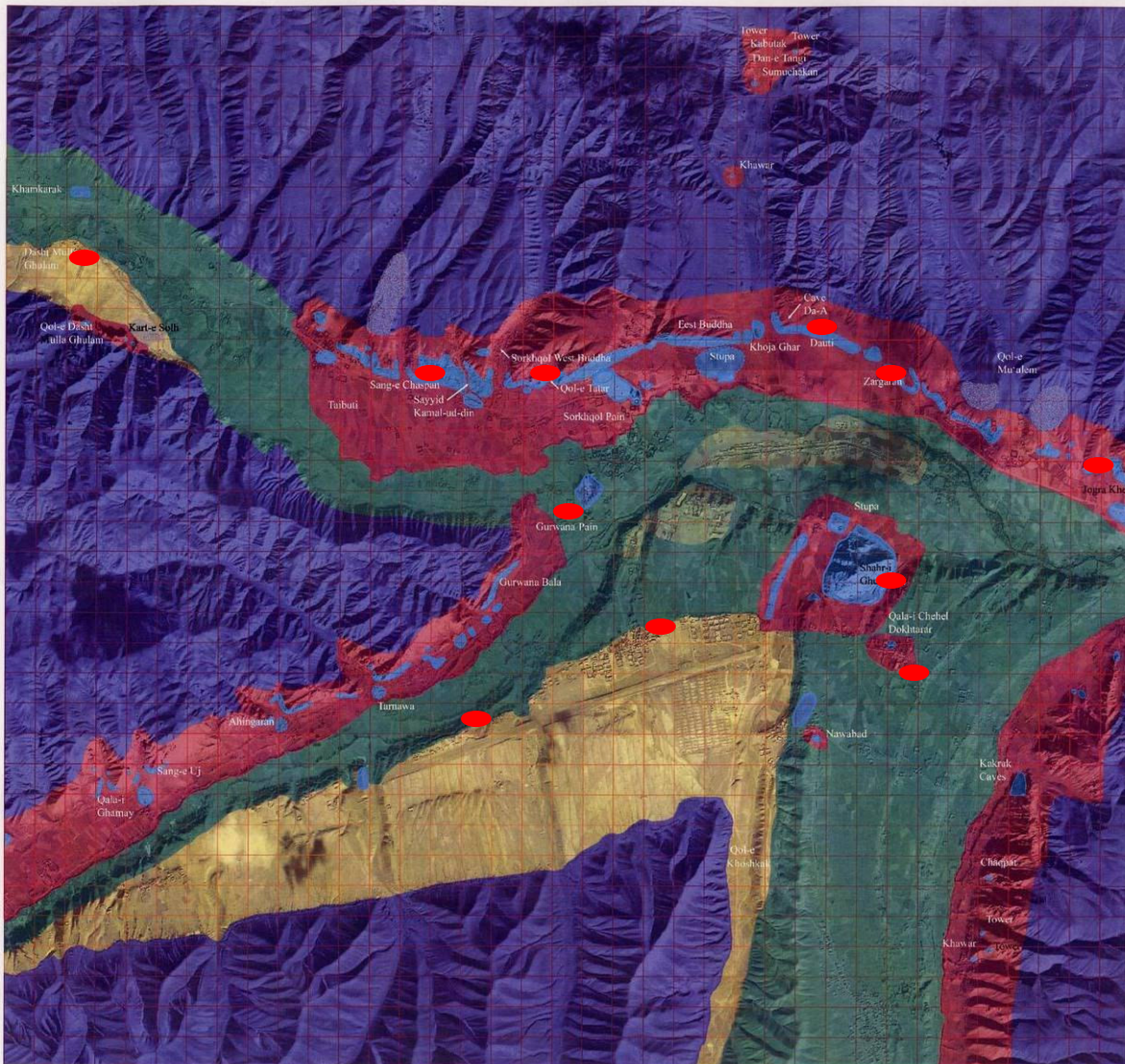
What is obvious today is the need for Bamiyan to establish a plan in order to manage its uncontrolled expansion and development. This is necessary in order to preserve its cultural landscape as well as to provide decent accommodation and infrastructure to the inhabitants of the area. Yet is the building of a city the appropriate response, as the local authorities seem to think?

First, one should address the fact that the master plan proposed by the governor seems to be quite detached from Bamiyan's realities and problems. There is a real gap between development priorities, perceptions of the villagers and the choice made by the local authorities. The local authorities want to build a totally new area on the plateau. No consultation process with the local population has been conducted. What the population wanted has not been listened to, in fact no-one even bothered to ask them: as a result the shopkeepers in the bazaar claim they would refuse to leave or to move if a new commercial area was created in the plateau. On top of this, the master plan is focusing only on one zone: the plateau which is already one of the richest of the area. Why not first develop the area where the poorest villages are situated since they are the ones who most urgently need infrastructure? The master plan does not tackle sanitation, electricity or water issues in the areas where they are the most needed, that is to say in the north. As a result the master plan does not seem to provide solution to people's needs and problems. Only two villages are included in the master plan and they are among the richest of the area. Thus, the danger of building a two-speed city is real problem. Local stakeholders have clearly chosen a development approach to deal with Bamiyan's issues. Nevertheless, in the northern villages of Bamiyan, there is an urgent need for an emergency approach. Bamiyan is in a transitional phase, where both emergency and development approaches are required.

Yet, the idea of a master plan should not be given up. A general consensus on the necessity of an urban plan is still true for both villagers and the local authorities. This consensus is worth paying attention to. Indeed it seems that in everyone's mind the development of a modern city remains the objective and symbolises a successful development. This is especially true for the population of Bamiyan who has experienced war and exile abroad. In this sense, building a city is also a way for a population who has experienced significant discrimination in the past to demonstrate that Hazara people are capable of building their own and successful development projects. It is possible to identify here some kind of irrational desire for expansion which the area may not necessarily need or indeed may not be capable of becoming a city so fast. One has the feeling that for the people of Bamiyan the city

symbolises the solution to all their problems. The myth of the modern city is very strong and is shared by all the population, especially those who have returned from abroad. Nevertheless where opinions begin to diverge is how to build this city and where the priorities lie. Bamiyan city has become a symbol for a country currently trying to catch up with modernity and development.

BAMIYAN CITY (original map made by UNESCO in 2004)



BAMIYAN Map 7

Map Indicating the Proposed Zoning for the Protection of the Cultural Landscape of Bamyan Based on a Satellite Photo

