

**IALC-USAID Sustainable Development of Drylands  
Trip Report – Visit to Pakistan and Afghanistan  
Oval Myers, Jr.  
October 29-November 14, 2004**

**Purpose of Trip:**

The purpose of the trip was: (1) to discuss the progress of the short course, twinning, and M.S. degree training programs for Afghans with the professors and researchers of the Northwest Frontier Province Agricultural University (NWFP-AU), (2) to meet with representatives of the USAID Missions to Pakistan and Afghanistan to discuss and obtain financial support for the FY/CY 2005 year continuation of the IALC/UIUC training program “Human Capacity Development for the Agriculture Sector in Afghanistan”, and (3) to review past training and future training needs with representatives of RAMP (Rebuilding Agricultural Markets in Afghanistan Program), of the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, of the Faculty of Agriculture, Kabul University, and of the Faculty of Agriculture, Balkh University.

**Summary of Findings:**

The timing of this trip, similar to last year, was nearly perfect. Our previous plans for late September or early October would likely not have been as productive. This trip was especially useful and productive because of the people we were able to interact with in Pakistan and, particularly in RAMP and USAID/Afghanistan. The trip also allowed John Santas and me to visit two key Research Stations for training programs in Pakistan and to visit Balkh University in Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan. Since this was our first opportunity to see Afghanistan outside of Kabul, we now have a better understanding of the needs, difficulties, and opportunities of and for agricultural development. We are even further convinced that training of human capital is a necessary step in the reconstruction effort. Our visit also provided another opportunity to thank the NWFP-AU system for their continued support in the Afghan training process.

There were several highlights of the trip, an important one being the opportunity to explain more fully the goals, objectives, and training methodology of the project to both the Afghanistan and Pakistan USAID Missions and to RAMP whose leadership changes almost annually due to posting requirements. Thus, an annual trip to both Pakistan and Afghanistan is a minimum need for continuity of Project understanding and commitment.

The value of having Mr. Md. Agha Jabarkhil as our Assistant in Kabul was very evident. Mr. Agha is competent, well liked, and knows his way within both the Pakistan and Afghanistan system. Dr. Qayyum and Afzal Sher are an excellent team because they are well known and well liked by our NWFP AU colleagues. Dr. Qayyum has also been able to function very well in Afghanistan due to his good interpersonal skills.

The growing awareness of our training program within Afghanistan may lead to greater interaction with other projects funded by RAMP and with some of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams, which have an agricultural component.

Our initial and current assessment of the Afghan agricultural training needs remain consistent with our project plan to provide a combination of short, medium, and degree training. The opportunity for AU Professors and Researchers to expand their professional skills and to assist their Afghan counterparts with working visits to Afghanistan through the anticipated funding being provided by USAID/Islamabad will enhance the progress of the NWFP-AU in becoming a regional educational center.

The discussions we had with the Faculty of Agriculture at Kabul University and with the Faculty of Agriculture at Balkh University suggest that a proactive approach to some form of institution building may be timely and in order.

### **Land and Air Travel:**

Outbound: Carbondale (BART van) – St. Louis – Chicago (AA) – London (AA) – Islamabad (BA) – Kabul (PIA)

Within Pakistan: Rental car

Within Afghanistan: Kabul – Mazar-e-Sharif (UN and AirServ); Rental SUV

Inbound: Kabul – Islamabad (road) – London (BA) – Chicago (AA) – St. Louis (AA) – Carbondale (BART van)

**Notes:** All flights were on time, security was good, and service was satisfactory. Road conditions were good in Pakistan, with some repair work in the Swat valley, and adequate within Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan. The Kabul to Torkham road ranged from poor to good, with the good sections being new road construction under Chinese management.

### **Summary of Activities:**

Friday, October 29, departed Illinois  
Saturday, October 30, in transit through London  
Sunday, October 31, arrival in Islamabad

Dr. Santas and I met in Chicago shortly before boarding for London. During a portion of that flight, subsequent flights, and a layover in London we discussed our visit to Pakistan and Afghanistan and how we should proceed in explaining the planned project activities for the coming year and the need for continued support from RAMP and additional “buy-in” from the respective Missions. We also discussed the NWFP-AU and how its support was critical to proposed project activities. We decided to write separate trip reports so that each of us could give our individual perspective on activities.

Day One, Sunday, October 31, 2004.

Our Project Field Director Dr. Abdul Qayyum Khan and Mr. Afzal Sher, Project Assistant/Driver, met us at the Islamabad airport upon our arrival at 6:00 a.m. We stayed at the Serena Hotel rather than the Islamabad Marriott, which had a security problem on the Thursday before our arrival. We briefly visited with Dr. Qayyum concerning our meeting on Monday with Mr. Peter Duffy of USAID.

The majority of the day was spent in rest and relaxation as we had traveled since Friday afternoon without an overnight stay. Our rooms were comfortable and the Hotel Business Center had excellent computer and Internet access. This allowed for good communication back home and for preparing documents as needed while we were in Islamabad.

Dr. Qayyum and his family, wife Ruby, son Shahab, daughter Noreen and her five week-old son, joined us for Iftar and dinner in the hotel. We have arrived during Ramadan so we will not regularly interrupt our workday for lunch.

Day Two, Monday, November 1

Following breakfast, Qayyum joined John and I for about an hour and a half discussion on the "Proposal to Strengthen the NWFP Agricultural University", which we would be explaining to Peter Duffy, USAID/Islamabad representative at 11:00 a.m.

We met with Peter Duffy for over an hour. We went through our several suggested areas for funding and Peter explained what the Mission felt it could support. He stressed that they wanted no duplication of funded activities supported by RAMP or the USAID Afghanistan Mission. USAID/Islamabad will treat funding for our activities as a "buy-in" directly to our IALC Project. We were asked to prepare a revised proposal following our meetings in Kabul for an amount of approximately \$450,000 showing contributions from all funding sources.

The straightforward and supportive approach of Peter Duffy and the USAID Mission to our training activities and our mutual interest in developing the NWFP-AU as a regional educational force is much welcomed. It appears that they like us feel that training is a good way of strengthening Pakistan/Afghanistan relations.

Day Three, Tuesday, November 2

We left just before 7 a.m. for Peshawar by road. The highway is much improved from TIPAN days with about 50 kilometers just outside of Islamabad as a six-lane divided highway. Part of the improved road conditions are being financed by tolls, we went through three tollbooths. We checked in at the Pearl Continental Hotel and then went to the AU. Dr. Qayyum and our Project have new offices in the TIPAN built building on the

East of the courtyard. This is an excellent location and gives the IALC/UIUC Project good visibility and room for meeting with the Afghan participants.

We met with Vice Chancellor S. Iqbal Shah from 11:00 a.m.– 12:00 p.m. in his office. He has new office furniture and the TIPAN furniture that was there last year is now in the waiting room. VC Shah remains quite supportive of the Project. He feels that his Professors and Researchers are gaining valuable teaching skills as well as assisting in the development of Afghan agriculture. He fully appreciates the desirability and potential benefits of renewing the Memorandum of Understanding between the AU and UIUC and SIUC.

We next met with some 20 AU Professors who had been involved in teaching short courses or were involved as advisors for the Afghan graduate students. In response to questions about their experiences with the Afghans in the short courses, they expressed satisfaction with the interest of the participants in learning. They also stressed the need for a blend of classroom and practical training. Several expressed a desire for some opportunity to visit Afghanistan and see and determine what the actual problems and potential was for progress in their various areas. They felt that this would help them in designing a more meaningful scope of learning activities for the courses. It was good to hear that some of the Professors are in regular contact via e-mail with some participants. When asked if they would consider a semester teaching assignment at Kabul or Nangarhar University several said they would and thought it a good idea for more quickly upgrading the curriculum.

We had the opportunity to meet with the 10 Afghan graduate students, five from Kabul University and five from Nangarhar University in Jalalabad. They had been on campus for about 10 weeks and were taking deficiency courses in their subject areas and some English training. We asked each of them to tell a little about their background and their expectations both for themselves and their home institution. We were quite impressed with their sincerity of purpose and their genuine interest in becoming more qualified in their teaching and research discipline. They are family men so there is a family as well as personal sacrifice in their attending graduate school. We became acutely aware through these discussions of the importance of Dr. Qayyum as a support person both academically and as counselor to the success of our training activities.

VC Shah hosted an Iftar and dinner at a restaurant in Peshawar with several key members of the AU in attendance. This provided John and I an opportunity to interact with old friends and to get a sense of how they viewed the AU's role in Afghanistan training needs.

#### Day Four, Wednesday, November 3

We began our morning at the AU with a tour of the Library. Mr. Attaullah, TIPAN trained librarian, visited with us and conducted a mini-tour. The Library has added several student study carrels since last year in response to student demands for more private study. Even at 8:30 a.m. there were a few students using the carrels. Our next stop

was the new Institute of Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering. This building was in the planning stages last year and is now functional. In fact, a class was being taught while we toured the building. The Director and another principal scientist are TIPAN graduates. They have entered into an agreement with CIMMYT for conducting collaborative research.

We visited with the Director of Research, Mr. Md. Amin, who voiced his support of our “twinning” training efforts at the research Institutes and stations. We traveled to the Agricultural Research Institute at Tarnab where we visited with Director General Jan and about 20 of his researchers. Some of the researchers involved with “twinning” discussed their experiences with Afghan counterparts. They echoed the statements of the AU Professors of the willingness to learn of the Afghans, but pointed out that lack of equipment and resources in Afghanistan would limit certain activities like developing a soil-testing laboratory. Again without prompting many scientists said they would like to visit their counterparts in Afghanistan to really determine what needed to be done and could be done in the existing environment.

Our last visit of the day was to City University in Peshawar, which has as its Chancellor Mohammad Asrar. Dr. Asrar was a former Registrar at the AU during critical development years of the TIPAN Project. Dr. Asrar now retired from the AU was a TIPAN degree recipient. We were graciously received and left feeling a sense of pride in the lasting effects that training of individuals can have on development.

In the evening we hosted the 10 Afghan graduate students for Iftar and dinner at the Shiraz restaurant, a restaurant very familiar to us during the TIPAN years. This provided an opportunity for informal visiting with the students and to learn about their families and their job responsibilities.

#### Day Five, Thursday, November 4

We departed at 7 a.m. for Mingora Research Station. The road through the Swat valley was undergoing widening, which has long been needed. We arrived at the station about 9:30 a.m. and met with Mohammad Rahim, Station Director, who is a former TIPAN student. Our discussions concerning “twinning” experiences again supported the interest in learning of the Afghans and the interest of the Pakistani researchers to get to Afghanistan so that they could better relate to the field situation.

The Mingora station is a model of efficiency and conducts experiments and germplasm development on many crops, mostly fruits and vegetables, but also on soybean and sunflower. They also have a mushroom culture program, which supplies cultures and training in production. Mingora is an excellent location for training Afghan researchers.

We left the station about noon and drove to the Swat Serena Hotel. Driving through the city at noon was an experience in patience as the streets were crowded with vehicles and people. The hotel is located just outside of Mingora and offers peace and quiet compared

to the city. After resting a bit John, Qayyum, and I spent most of the afternoon discussing our approach to the revision requests of Peter Duffy for the AU strengthening proposal.

Another Iftar and dinner at the hotel capped the day. John and I are becoming used to going without lunch and like Qayyum look forward to the breaking of the fast.

#### Day Six, Friday, November 5

After breakfast we left for Islamabad taking a different route back to the Grand Trunk road. The roads had several curves, but the change in scenery and going through the different towns made it an enjoyable four-hour trip.

The afternoon and early evening was spent in catching up on e-mail correspondence and items related to our visit to Afghanistan next week.

#### Day Seven, Saturday, November 6

There was considerable discussion in the morning with John and Qayyum about our program of activities in Kabul, particularly our meeting with several individuals in RAMP.

Departed for the airport around 11:30 am for our 1:30 p.m. flight to Kabul. We were delayed in departure and later learned it was because the Pakistan President was flying to Kabul at about the same time. When we arrived in Kabul his plane was parked near the terminal. It was a good flight and we had less difficulty than last year in getting through customs. We met a young woman in the Islamabad airport who was a news person working with ABC. Her beat included Pakistan and Afghanistan and she made monthly trips to Afghanistan. We later saw her when we visited USAID in Kabul.

Mr. M. Agha Jabarkhil, our Afghan Project Assistant based in Kabul, and the same driver that drove for us last year met us at the airport. The nearly new SUV provided comfortable and reliable transportation for our stay in Afghanistan. We went to the ASSA 2 guesthouse, which was the same place we stayed last year. They have expanded their computer service from four a year ago to 15 computers for rental use. There are now telephones and small televisions in some of the rooms.

#### Day Eight, Sunday, November 7

Our first stop this morning was at Mercy Corps where Mr. Agha has a small office for our Project. This office is very important to our Afghanistan activities because it provides not only a work office with computer and Internet service but also a meeting place for prospective participants in our training program.

We drove to the RAMP offices for our next meeting. The meeting was with Tim Mooney, Project Supervisor and Acting Chief of Party and several other RAMP Project personnel. Mr. Mooney informed us that a thorough review of the current RAMP

portfolio of some 40 job orders would be conducted in the next weeks as they work to meet their ambitious market oriented short-term goals. The original discussion by Ken Neils highlighted the pressure on RAMP to deliver on their short-term objectives. The somewhat negative tone to start our discussions improved as we had the opportunity to highlight our accomplishments and to point out that our training activities were available to their other job orders and to some extent had already been used. Thus, we left with the impression that with some tweaking of delivery methods and locations our 2<sup>nd</sup> year job order would be supported. It is clear that as much training as possible needs to be done within Afghanistan. We were also able to agree on a contract change, which would allow financial reporting identical to other US government and university contracts.

Our next meeting was with Mohammad Yasin Mohsini, Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture at Kabul University. Dean Mohsini and several of his staff, including some past participants in our short courses, discussed progress and developments within their faculty since our visit one year ago. We were surprised that a few of the M.S. students at the AU had returned for the Eid holiday and were in attendance. It was clear that those participating in our training courses felt benefited and were using some of the things learned in their teaching. The importance of the M.S. opportunity in Peshawar to their young Professors was emphasized. The Dean pointed out the considerable difficulty some of his staff had had in trying to pursue a program in countries with a greatly different culture and language. He also emphasized the need to redevelop a model experimental area for conducting teaching and research activities on campus. Apparently the area they used to have is in poor condition and lacking a functional well. The expertise as well as the resources to develop the area are also lacking. The AU experimental farm could serve as a model for this redevelopment.

Dean Mohsini also mentioned the need for library development and was pleased with the new IALC project component being led by the University of Arizona. He intends to visit the AU-Peshawar in the near future along with several of his department heads, to initiate an active exchange between the two universities.

In the evening we were invited for dinner to the guesthouse home of Don Meyer, Illinois native and long-time worker in Afghanistan development projects. His guests included a lady from Wyoming whom we met last year and who worked with the UN on the recent elections, a lady from Tanzania, and a gentleman from Peru. Truly it was a multicultural evening.

#### Day Nine, Monday, November 8

This morning we met with individuals of USAID/Kabul in the new compound of offices across the street from the U.S. Embassy. This area had been an open field last year. USAID is demonstrating a much stronger and more visible presence in Afghanistan compared to last year. We met with Dr. Barry Primm, Deputy Mission Director, and Mr. Albert Merkel, Acting CTO for Agriculture, while Dan Miller was on home leave. Dr. Primm and Mr. Merkel were in the Pakistan USAID Mission during the start of the TIPAN Project. They were former colleagues and friends of Dr. Qayyum. Since we did

not know about the relocation of USAID to across the street, we were about one-half hour late for our appointment. Thus, our meeting room had been taken and we had to meet in the cafeteria, a fortunate turn of events since we walked by the office carrel of Scott Christiansen who was on TDY in Kabul for Dan Miller. Scott joined us and was helpful in explaining the core component of our IALC/ANE Cooperative Agreement. We had a very fruitful discussion with Primm, Merkel, and Christiansen on the accomplishments of our training activities to date and stressed the potential of our project for human capacity building.

Following our meeting with USAID we went to the Daral Amaan Research Station located on the outskirts of Kabul for visits with several participants in our short courses and in the “twinning” program. These participants expressed appreciation for the training and described for us their role as researchers at the station. Their frustration at the lack of equipment for conducting research other than simple field and greenhouse work became apparent. It is obvious that visits from their Pakistani counterparts would serve as a stimulus in helping them to plan needed research that could be done with limited resources.

We returned to the RAMP offices to meet with Ms. Susan DeCamp, Communication Specialist. Albert Merkel had suggested we meet with Susan so that she might prepare what was called a worldwide cable for USAID release that featured the payoff value of institution building projects like TIPAN. We left her a copy of the recent article from SIUC Perspectives, a fact sheet on the TIPAN accomplishments, and reports on our current IALC/UIUC Project.

I met with Steven Kwon of NEI (Nutrition and Education International) at the ASSA 2 guesthouse to discuss a soybean presentation at the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry (MOAAH) tomorrow. The early evening was spent reading and answering e-mail.

Day Ten, Tuesday, November 9

We began the day with a courtesy call on the Deputy Minister of MOAAH, Mr. Md. Sharif. The Deputy Minister was pleased that many of his officers had availed themselves of our short course training. During the rest of the morning we attended a program on soybean nutrition and soybean production presented to key policy makers and scientists of MOAAH by Dr. Kwon of NEI and by myself. It appears that the limited experimentation conducted this year on soybean in Mazar-e-Sharif will lead to more extensive country experimentation next year. AU researchers from the Mingora Research Station as well as some of the soybean varieties that were developed at that station may be utilized in the training and expansion effort.

In the afternoon we returned to the USAID offices where we met with Scott Christiansen and Howard Anderson, Agricultural Attaché, Islamabad who also has responsibilities for Afghanistan. We discussed our project accomplishments and its future potential for human capacity building in both countries. He suggested that some of our proposed ideas for strengthening the AU, particularly in biotechnology, might be considered for USDA



support. This was a long enough meeting that Scott invited us to have dinner at the cafeteria. During our meal USAID Mission Director Patrick Fine came by our table to say hello. He was aware of details of our Project and during the conversation said he had visited Carbondale several years ago on a high school band trip when he was a student in Jefferson City, Missouri. We returned to the ASSA 2 guesthouse about 7 p.m. Quite a full and productive day.

#### Day Eleven, Wednesday, November 10

We left for the airport around 9 a.m. for our 10:30 a.m. flight on a small UN plane to Mazar-e-Sharif. We were going on a double mission to interact with the administration of Balkh University and with the Faculty of Agriculture and to participate in the soybean nutrition and production seminars by NEI and myself.

We arrived at a guesthouse operated by an NGO called Global Partners, which was being managed by a young couple from Oklahoma. John and I broke our fasting with a light lunch. We met a fascinating couple from the US, he was working with an NGO involved in digging water wells in the surrounding rural villages and she was serving as a nurse.

The seminars were held in a fairly large hotel. My soybean production seminar was attended by some 30 Afghan farmers and by a few Balkh University professors, including the three that had been working on the soybean experiment. Of course there was a translator, but the presentation went well and the farmers asked much the same questions as would be asked at such a presentation in the US. One attendee working for a different NGO in Mazar-e-Sharif was a recent Cornell University M.S. graduate and we knew several people in common.

The Iftar and dinner followed the seminar programs. We returned to the guesthouse having completed another rather full day.

#### Day Twelve, Thursday, November 11

This morning we started our visit at Balkh University with about a half-hour meeting with the Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, and the Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture, coincidentally also named Abdul Qayyum. Balkh University was built about 18 years ago by the Soviet Union. They seem to have a growing program and new facilities are being started on the out skirts of the city. These administrators were appreciative of any training activities and stated they were critically in need of support to equip their classrooms and laboratories.

We then spent about an hour and a half with the Faculty of Agriculture. The Faculty has 15 Professors of which three are women. The Faculty has about 300 of the total 3000 students in the university. Three had participated in our short courses and two are nominated for the next 20 M.S. degree students. They stressed the information value of the courses and were appreciative of the networking opportunities they provided both with Pakistani Professors and with others from Afghanistan institutions. It was apparent here as it was in Kabul University that some form of institution building activity needs to

take place in order to permit them to become an important educational force in the recovery of Afghanistan.

We had a few minutes to visit the central park area of Mazar-e-Sharif and to visit an impressive shrine to the 4<sup>th</sup> caliph. Mazar-e-Sharif is over a half million in population, perhaps larger with adjoining villages. Like in Kabul there are new buildings going up, the shops seem to be full, and fruit, vegetable, and meat markets abound.

Our return trip to Kabul was by a small plane operated by AirServ, which caters to the NGO community. Somewhere in our conversations in Afghanistan we heard there might be as many as 3,000 different NGOs, including those originating in Afghanistan itself. Prior to our departure from the airport we observed two military transports operated by the ISAF in an exchange of troops and in unloading of supplies.

Day Thirteen, Friday, November 12

Today was spent at the ASSA 2 guesthouse with a discussion of what we had learned both in Pakistan and in Afghanistan and in writing up and sending by e-mail the revised proposal for Peter Duffy. Although these notes would indicate an uneventful day, it was a full and most important day in allowing us to bring our busy two weeks to a productive conclusion.

Day Fourteen, Saturday, November 13

With the expectation of an afternoon flight to Islamabad, we began our day in a leisurely fashion. I visited with Ken Neils of RAMP by telephone concerning his ideas on the possible increased experimentation on soybean in the country. He felt soybean could be a value-added crop that should be considered in their alternative crop strategy.

About 9:30 a.m. our leisurely day changed when Qayyum's wife called and informed us that PIA had canceled the Kabul flight, presumably due to the end of Ramadan in Afghanistan. Qayyum quickly called our SUV owner who said he and our driver would take us to the Pakistan border at Torkham. This quick response to our need further demonstrates the excellent interpersonal working relationships developed by Qayyum in Afghanistan. We quickly finished packing and were on the way about 10:15 a.m. via the Kabul-Jalalabad-Torkham road.

Although this journey was obviously unplanned, it provided John and me a chance to experience the rugged mountainous terrain and rural countryside in a way not possible by viewing it from the air. The road was solid, but quite rocky and rough through the mountains and somewhat smoother in the valley areas. The Chinese were involved with road building and there were a few scattered kilometers of new asphalt road between Kabul and Jalalabad. From Jalalabad to Torkham the road was smoother and Pakistan is helping to improve sections of that road similarly to the Chinese.

We arrived at the Pakistan border about 5 p.m. and were met by Afzal Sher. We drove through the Khyber Pass to Peshawar where we stopped for dinner at a Kentucky Fried Chicken. After dinner we continued on to Islamabad arriving about 9 p.m. where we met Peter Duffy just leaving from a dinner at the Serena Hotel. This was another of our frequent serendipity events throughout our TDY as we had originally planned to meet Duffy about 6 p.m., but was not able to contact him due to our change in travel plans. Since he had read our e-mail and attachments we were able to discuss and agree rather quickly on the basic parts of our AU strengthening proposal for \$474,000. Needless to say, a very long, but productive day.

Day Fifteen, November 14

We departed for the airport shortly after 6 a.m. with Qayyum and Afzal. The airport lines were shorter than usual and we departed for London on time. John and I discussed various project-related ideas on the trip home. We feel it may be time to determine if the IALC and/or the Illinois universities take a more proactive position in identifying institutional development needs and opportunities in Afghanistan. The remainder of the trip was uneventful, but long, as I had a two-hour van ride from St. Louis to Carbondale to complete the trip arriving home about midnight.