

Livelihoods and sustainable land management in a fragile context: a case study from mountainous Northern Afghanistan



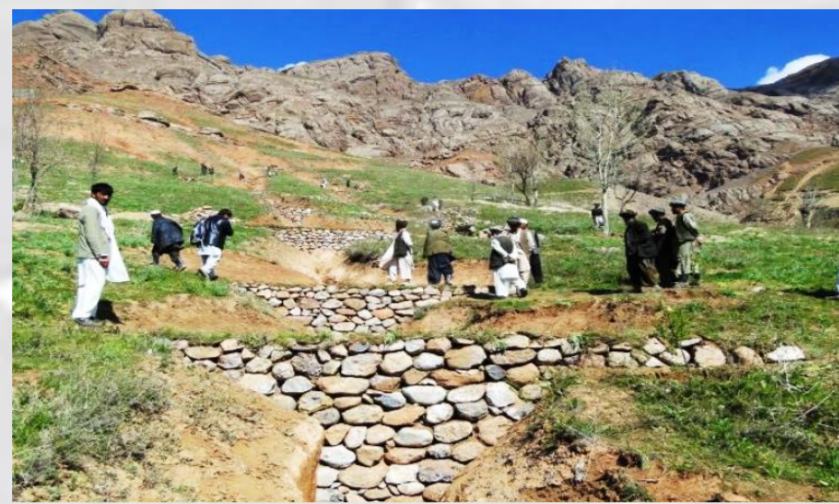
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Context

Life in Rustaq district is characterised by high fragility, deep poverty and severe land degradation where questions to do with food security and livelihoods figure very prominently. A development project of an international NGO supports the implementation of 12 sustainable land management (SLM) practices, namely orchards, terraces, gully treatment, afforestation, ferula cultivation, vineyards, grazing plans, pasture rehabilitation, fodder banks, livestock sheds, hedgerows, and tree nurseries. As in many other places the question of intervention sustainability arises – whether and how local people will carry the initiative further after the project ends.



Cropland in August, upper zone.



Gully treatment, upper zone.



Intensively used landscape, May, middle zone.



Summer camp of farmers, middle zone.

Objective

This study aims to better understand local people's aspired livelihood outcomes, strategies and activities and their assessment of different SLM practices in order to identify potentials and limitations for improved natural resource management (NRM) in Chokar watershed, Northern Afghanistan, and other mountainous regions in Central Asia.



Gully through village, lower zone.



Mixed SLM practices, lower zone.

Photographs by Reto Zehnder, Aqila Haidery

Methodology

Block A (Sept/Oct 2016)

Survey with 61 men and 60 women farmers in three villages representing the upper, middle, lower watershed zone, generating qualitative and quantitative data.

Block B (Dec 2016)

Qualitative follow-up: 24 key informant interviews, 26 focus group discussions.

Results

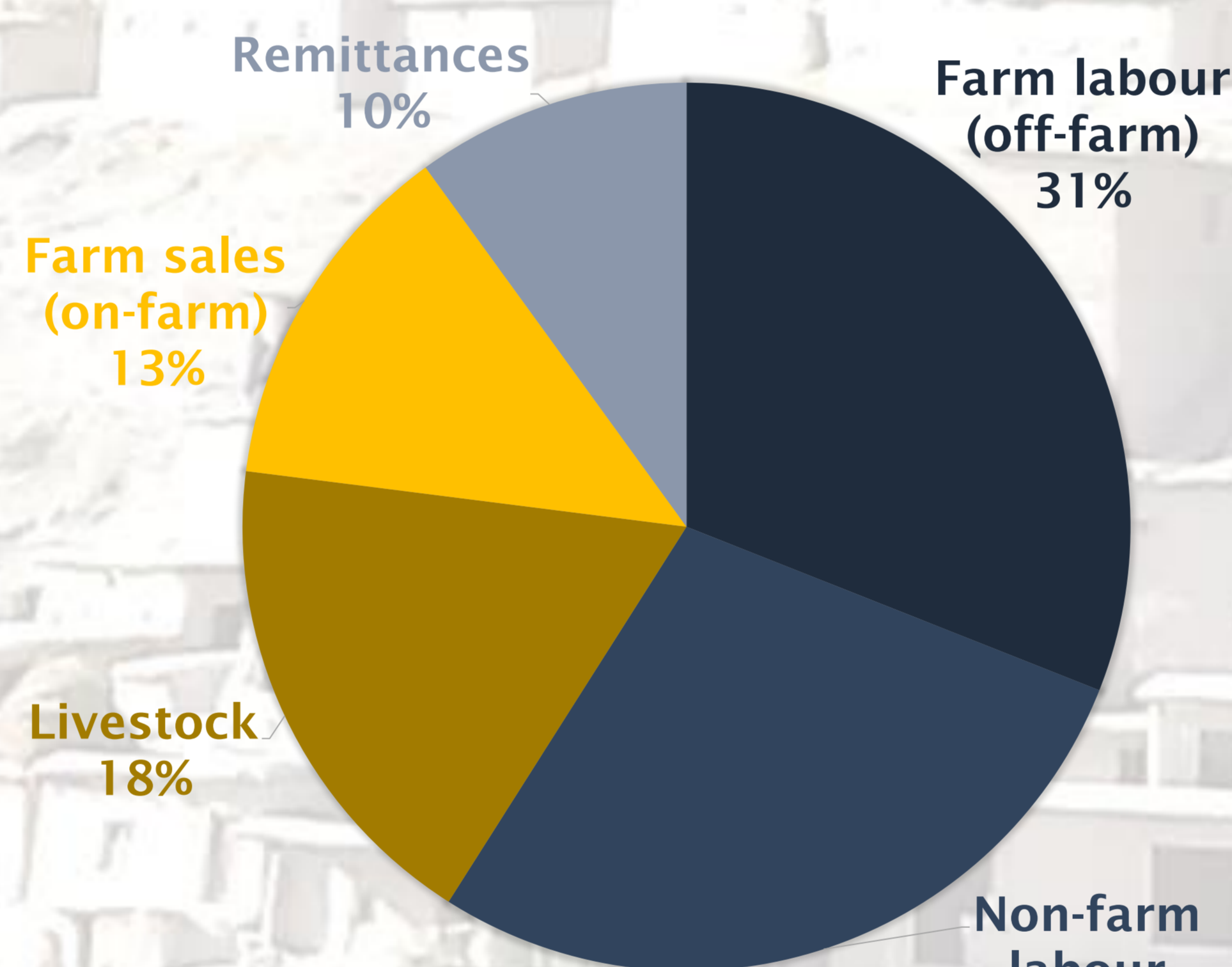
Local livelihoods

- ❖ HHs own <1 ha rain-fed land (average), half own orchard, 20% irrigated land.
- ❖ Almost all HHs keep livestock.
- ❖ Pastures are held in common, are overgrazed, degraded in people's view.
- ❖ 92% of respondents intend to increase their livestock.
- ❖ Wheat self-sufficiency 5 months in a good year, 2 months in a bad year.
- ❖ No subsistence-only HHs; agriculture important but other livelihood activities; all HHs have multiple income sources.

Experience with Innovation & SLM

- ❖ ~90% of respondents mentioned changed agricultural practices in the last few years (e.g. fertilizer, tractors).
- ❖ >90% of respondents took an interest in at least one SLM practice; with high expectations towards SLM.
- ❖ Spontaneous SLM Replication: ~2%
- ❖ Intention of SLM Replication
 - with support: 64%
 - without support: 15%

The share of agriculture in HH income



Prominent Livelihood Strategies

	Work Hard	Farming	Son Support	Migra-tion	Non-Farm Labor	External Support	Work Every-where	More Live-stock	Get Heal-thy	Day Labour	Savings	Edu-cation	Sell Pro-perty	New life
%	21	13	13	9	8	7	6	5	5	4	3	2	2	1

Main hindering factors for SLM adoption

- ❖ High establishment and maintenance costs.
 - ❖ Management and cooperation challenges in common pool resources (e.g. pastures).
 - ❖ Heavy additional workload (workforce issue links to health, migration, gender roles etc.).
 - ❖ Other matters absorb attention, workforce and money (e.g. physical and mental health issues, debts, costly weddings etc.)
 - ❖ Labour migration very widespread, especially to Iran (mostly young men)
 - ❖ Aspirations of many: non-farming activities.
 - ❖ Young generation partly aspires to urban life.
- ❖ **6 SLM practices of most interest (in order):** Terraces, Orchards, Gully treatment, Afforestation, Ferula cultivation, Vineyard.
- ❖ **6 SLM practices of least interest (in order):** Grazing plans, Pasture rehab, Fodder banks, Livestock sheds, Hedgerows, tree nurseries.

Conclusion

- ❖ Difficult to assess real costs and benefits of SLM interventions for both farmers and researchers at this point: SLM interventions were only implemented recently, and externally supported.
- ❖ Farmers take interest in SLM practices – but it requires substantial investments (money, land, labour, knowledge, process facilitation). For majority of SLM practices it is questionable whether local people will be able/willing to mobilize resources. External support necessary to contribute to improved NRM at larger scale.
- ❖ Pastures are central, are at the roots of many conflicts, are degraded with diminishing area – and yet farmers wish for more animals. Pastureland and its management is challenging yet crucial and meaningful in its potential to substantially work towards improved NRM and local-level peace-building.
- ❖ The manifold needs and aspirations of local people moreover suggest that further issues within and beyond agriculture require utmost attention.