



The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library

This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.

Help ensure our sustainability.

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search

<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>

aesearch@umn.edu

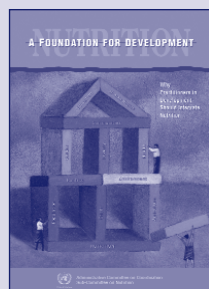
*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

No endorsement of AgEcon Search or its fundraising activities by the author(s) of the following work or their employer(s) is intended or implied.



IFPRI PERSPECTIVES

featured publication



DOWNLOAD AT:
www.ifpri.org

Nutrition: A Foundation for Development—Why Practitioners in Development Should Integrate Nutrition. A set of 12 briefs published by the UN ACC Sub-Committee on Nutrition (SCN) with assistance from IFPRI and others. 2002 / 48 pages

Distributed by:
UN ACC Sub-Committee on Nutrition
c/o World Health Organization
20 Avenue Appia
CH 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland
Telephone: +41-22-791 04 56
Fax: +41-22-798 88 91
Email: accscn@who.int
Web: <http://acc.unsystem.org/scn/>



INTERNATIONAL
FOOD
POLICY
RESEARCH
INSTITUTE

IFPRI®

2033 K Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006-1002 USA
Telephone: +1-202-862-5600
Fax: +1-202-467-4439
Email: ifpri@cgiar.org
Web: www.ifpri.org

Writer and Editor: Joanna Berkman
Art and Production Manager: Evelyn Banda
Designer: Joan Kirstin Stephens
Illustration: John Overmeyer

Copyright © 2002 International Food Policy Research Institute. All rights reserved.

From Relief to Recovery: Rebuilding Afghanistan

Afghanistan's economic and social indicators could hardly be worse. Over 7 million people face starvation. Afghanistan has the world's fourth highest child mortality rate: More than 25 percent die before reaching age 5. One-quarter of Afghan children under 5 suffer from moderate to severe wasting. Afghanistan ranks at the bottom of the UN gender development index and its maternal death rate is one of the highest in the world.

A large percentage of Afghans are sick, hungry, homeless, and destitute. Many cities have been reduced to rubble. Fields and rangelands have been planted with landmines and desiccated by the worst drought in 30 years. Decades of war have killed, maimed, and displaced millions of people, driving 6 million refugees to neighboring states, Europe, Australia, and America. Chaos, continuous warfare, and Taliban tyranny destroyed most of the nation's educational, healthcare, social, administrative, and economic institutions.

Yet there is hope. With the fall of the Taliban, girls are flocking back to school, young women and men are taking university entrance exams, and thousands of educated, highly trained Afghan expatriates are organizing to return to lend a hand. While private voluntary organizations and UN emergency assistance agencies deliver immediate food aid, members of the international community have been meeting to help establish an interim central government, monitor Afghanistan's transition, and pledge technical assistance and development funds.

Is There an Economist in the House?

Like the doctor who steps forward to help in a medical emergency, IFPRI economists are joining initiatives to share their knowledge so that Afghanistan can rebuild rapidly. The Future Harvest Consortium to Rebuild



Photo by WFP/Michael Huggins

Agriculture in Afghanistan is supplying tons of seed to Afghan farmers. That effort, spearheaded by the International Centre for Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), relies on years of seed testing in Afghanistan by the Centro Internacional de Mejoramiento de Maíz y Trigo (CIMMYT), and is the first step in re-establishing Afghanistan's agricultural sector. As farming and agricultural production increases, food aid will have to be phased out so as not to distort markets. That's when IFPRI's strengths will be needed.

"IFPRI's expertise in designing and implementing government policies for food, agriculture, and the environment can help us apply the many lessons learned in other countries to rebuilding Afghanistan," IFPRI Director General Per Pinstrup-Andersen

says. "We have long collaborated with Pakistan on government policies to improve food security in the region. A great deal of research on the link between poverty and hunger on the one hand and armed conflict on the other makes it clear that unless human suffering is alleviated, we will not be able to avoid future conflicts in Central Asia."

Ashok Gulati, director of IFPRI's Markets and Structural Studies Division, attended the Future Harvest Consortium stakeholder meeting convened by ICARDA in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in late January 2002. Seventy-four participants from 34 international organizations gathered on short notice, at their own expense, with a single purpose: to help Afghan farmers restore food security. The stakeholders developed a plan to deliver high-quality seeds immediately to Afghan farmers, but recognized that rapid needs assessments would have to be conducted as soon as the security situation within Afghanistan allows.

Revive Afghan Agriculture

The agricultural sector was the mainstay of Afghanistan's economy and its regeneration is fundamental to the nation's recovery. With massive and wise investments in seed and crop improvement and diversification, soil and water management, horticulture, and livestock, the agricultural sector can thrive again (see page 4).

Prior to the Soviet and civil wars, 85 percent of Afghans depended on agriculture, horticulture, and livestock farming for their livelihoods. Between 1979 (when the Soviets invaded) and 1992, food production in Afghanistan dropped by 40 percent. Only 12 percent of Afghanistan's land is arable, of which half is irrigated. Only 40 percent of arable land is under cultivation due to drought, the shortage of seeds and other inputs, and the collapse of irrigation infrastructure. A joint 2001 report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission to Afghanistan estimated that "about one-half of irrigated area had gone out of use" and that "rainfed crops (wheat and barley) had almost totally failed."

IFPRI's expertise in designing and implementing government policies for food, agriculture, and the environment can help us apply the many lessons learned in other countries to rebuilding Afghanistan.

Until 1988, livestock accounted for 40 percent of Afghanistan's national exports. Devastated during the war years, the livestock sector, which includes sedentary farmers, transhumant tribes, and nomadic herders, suffered further as water shortages destroyed pastures and caused animal deaths, crisis sales, and low fertility and replacement rates. The FAO/WFP mission report estimated that herd numbers had plummeted further by 40 percent from already lowered 1998 levels.

"The challenge of Afghanistan is staring us right in the face," Gulati observes. "If we fail to rise to the occasion, our commitment to poverty alleviation, our credibility, and our compassion will all be in question. If the world wants it, ending hunger in Afghanistan can easily be accomplished, but we must offer more than food security. We must seek justice as well."

These goals can be achieved in part by taking the following priority actions.

Recognize and Guarantee Women's Human Rights

A country cannot succeed in "eradicating poverty unless women are healthy, educated, empowered in the economic and political field, and protected from gender-based violence," the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) affirmed in a 2002 report. None of these conditions exists in Afghanistan today.

In just five years, the Taliban reversed the progress Afghan women had made throughout the 20th century. According to Sima Wali, Afghan activist and president of Refugee Women in Development, Afghan women gained the vote in the early 1920s, when American suffragists were still fighting for enfranchisement. In the 1960s, the Afghan government made wearing the veil and seclusion of women discretionary.

And Afghanistan's 1964 constitution included an equal rights amendment, which further guaranteed women's right to vote.

The communist government established with Soviet backing in the late 1970s brought unanticipated benefits to women: Bride price and forced marriage were banned, the minimum age for marriage was raised, and both women and men were educated. These reforms were not well received by tribal chiefs in rural areas or by fundamentalist Islamic leaders, and mainly benefited women in larger cities.

Before the Taliban took power in 1996, many highly trained urban women worked outside the home, bringing in earnings on which their families depended. The Women's Alliance for Peace and Human Rights in Afghanistan estimated that women in Kabul, the capital, made up over 50 percent of students and professors at Kabul University, 70 percent of schoolteachers, 50 percent of civilian government workers, and 40 percent of doctors.

The Taliban's worst excesses may be over. But the aftermath of the Taliban's denial of education, work, and medical care to Afghan women remains. Speaking at a World Bank panel in March 2002, Sima Wali detailed the daunting challenge ahead. "Afghan women are the most oppressed in the world, and the most undernourished members of society: 12 million Afghan women live in abject poverty. An Afghan woman dies in childbirth every half hour. Eighty percent of women are illiterate. Seventy percent of tuberculosis cases are women. There are more than 40,000 widows in Kabul alone. Women are struggling with huge psychological trauma. The physical burka is much easier to lift than the emotional one," she said. "That will take time."

Restoring Afghan women's human rights depends on peace and stable government, which are by no means assured. In testimony last year before the U.S. Congress, Tahmeena Faryal of the Revolutionary Association of Women in Afghanistan (RAWA) expressed her people's fears: "The Mujahadeen forces [that made up] the Taliban and [are now part of] the Northern Alliance waged a brutal war against women, using rape, torture, abduction, and forced marriage as their weapons. Many women committed suicide during this period as their only escape. . . [These Jihadis] have yet . . . to offer a single shred of . . . credible evidence that they would not repeat their prior atrocities." Afghan women continue to live with and among these men.

Though a handful of staunch spokeswomen have voiced Afghan women's concerns in stakeholder meetings in Bonn and Tokyo, the paucity of female faces at the table when peace and transitional arrangements were being negotiated attests to continuing resistance among some men in power to women's participation in public life. Last November, when women attempted to rally publicly for the right to play a more active role in society, Northern Alliance officials dispersed them, claiming disingenuously that they feared for the women's safety.

The interim government's Ministry of Women's Affairs is an important first step, but according to Sima Wali, "It is not enough. We need women deputies in all the other 'male' agencies." She calls for mainstreaming gender considerations through a gender stakeholder survey and analysis. "Only by developing such indicators and generating basic data can we ensure logic and transparency in gender issues," she says.

The culture of violence and gender apartheid that sentenced women to invisible lives of pain, ignorance, and silence will not help rebuild Afghanistan. That will take women's work (see page 5). For this reason, reconstruction and development policies and programs in Afghanistan must reach women and girls directly. Affirmative actions to restore Afghan women's rights are at the heart of the nation's recovery.

Educate to Develop Human Capital

The secret schools that Afghan women spontaneously created for their daughters will help some girls return to the same class levels they left in 1996. But most face a five-year learning gap, a problem they share with their brothers, whose madrassa studies under the Taliban did nothing to prepare them to earn a living in a globalized world.

IFPRI has worked with developing country governments to create programs that encourage poor families to send children to school with special incentives for parents to educate their daughters. Similar programs could be designed for Afghanistan. Policies that tie education to food and focus on girls are a win-win solution for the entire society (see page 6).

Re-establish Markets and Governing Institutions

Millions of Afghans have no access to food through markets, and it isn't just because people lack purchasing power. According to FAO, "Afghanistan's economy is virtually without a direction in the absence of a macro-economic framework. Budgetary operations are defunct, there are no banks operating in the country, and the manufacturing and export sectors . . . remain marginal . . . Transportation and communication systems are in extremely poor shape."

Markets and basic governing institutions will have to be revived and a proper regulatory framework restored with the participation of traders, farmers, and government agencies. These market and institutional forces would make it possible for Afghan farmers to sell their produce as well as protect them against volatile pricing, lower their transaction costs, and increase their incentives to adopt new technologies in order to boost agricultural production. Without proper economic, social, and institutional restructuring, food security and justice will remain elusive goals for the Afghan people. ■

WHAT IS THE "TRAGEDY OF THE COMMONS"?

The phrase "tragedy of the commons" was first used in a 1968 article by Garret Hardin in *Science* magazine. According to this short article, the commons are bound to be overexploited, and uncontrolled use would overburden, pollute, and eventually destroy the very resources upon which agriculture, and life, depend. Hardin viewed environmental destruction of the commons as inevitable for two reasons: unrestricted population growth and the inexorable logic of the commons itself, which socializes the costs and individualizes the benefits of use. In a pasture used by one or more communities, the benefits to the individual pastoralist of increasing his/her herd by one more animal accrues entirely to that individual, whereas the cost of supporting the additional animal is distributed among all who use the pasture. As the number of people using the resource increases, animal productivity declines and environmental degradation increases, producing the "tragedy of the commons."

However, overexploitation is not the only possible outcome for common rangelands, and it is not even the likely result when use can be restricted. In Hardin's article, the argument rests on the assumption that if there is no property rights institution to enforce individual property rights, then there is no property rights institution at all. If it is true that no institution exists to regulate property rights, then a tragedy is likely to result. However, in most cases, alternative institutional structures arise precisely to manage potential problems of overuse that make everyone worse off. IFPRI research has shed a good deal of light on the wide range of alternative property rights institutions, as illustrated in the adjoining article, "Tribal Strengths Can Help Manage Common Land." ■

For information on a recent IFPRI/USAID workshop on rangelands, see *Future Opportunities for Rural Africa* at www.ifpri.org. For a report on the International Conference on Policy and Institutional Options for the Management of Rangelands in Dry Areas, see www.capri.cgiar.org/range_article.htm.

* This is a revision of the article that appears in the printed version of *IFPRI Perspectives*, April 2002.

Tribal Strengths Can Help Manage Common Land

In many parts of the world, tribes remain a powerful political force, often challenging each other and national governments. Recent reports from Afghanistan, where warlords battle for control and tribes perpetually shift alliances, illustrate the instability that results when tribes compete rather than cooperate. But IFPRI research in other Islamic countries shows that intertribal strife is not inevitable. In fact, building on tribal affiliations can be the basis of cooperation. By enlisting local communities in decisionmaking, national governments can reinforce solidarity and collective action among tribal members, reduce potential disputes between tribes, and create a workable division of responsibility between tribal and central authorities.

Pastoral communities have often been blamed for rangeland degradation.

Governments responded by attempting to reform land tenure systems and tribal institutions. Centralized efforts to manage rangelands focused on settling pastoral communities, appropriating pastoral resources, and granting a greater role to government institutions. Traditional reciprocal grazing arrangements between tribes were maintained but the settlement of many pastoralists and their involvement in crop production reduced flock mobility and the use of tribal networks. Such policies only worsened land degradation, reduced production, and weakened pastoral livelihoods.

The overwhelming failure of state interventions to improve rangeland management prompted governments to re-evaluate traditional pastoral systems and institutions that empower local communities and foster stewardship. IFPRI/ICARDA research offers evidence that tribes in less-favored lands can cooperate with national governments and each other to create security for their citizens through effective resource management. Tribes are part of the solution.

“Many governments hesitate to rely on tribal systems or make local communities responsible for rangeland development because there are no legal frameworks to secure community rights or provide incentives for sustaining rangeland resources,” Tidiane Ngaido, a research fellow in the Environment and Production Technology Division explains. Ngaido directs data collection and analysis in Jordan, Morocco, Syria, and Tunisia on institutional options for rangeland management. The study, funded by the CGIAR Collective Action

and Property Rights initiative (CAPRI) and Ford Foundation/Cairo, is part of a larger joint IFPRI/ICARDA project that also includes Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Libya.

“Tribal-based approaches can work,” says Ngaido, “but to manage rangelands in low-rainfall areas, both tribal and government participation are essential. The government’s role is to provide a legal framework by which to grant and guarantee tenure security.”

- *Rangelands comprise 46 percent of Afghanistan’s territory.*
- *Rangeland resources include distinct ecosystems, native wildlife, and plants that provide grazable forage.*

Recent results of rangeland management experiments in Jordan are encouraging. Two resource management systems were tried side by side. The government was responsible for 2,600 hectares, which it fenced in and guarded year-round. Herders with government contracts were allowed to use the pasture only once or twice a year. In contrast, the Ader community, which petitioned the government for use rights and to manage its own pastures, built no fences on its 1,200 hectares, organized a

cooperative, set up a fee system by which members paid for each sheep that grazed, and required members to contribute labor every year for reforestation and management efforts. Productivity per hectare was about the same for both systems early in the project. But in the Ader cooperative, which had far less land and much lower transaction costs, productivity rose. The Ader community now has a new milk processing plant to which members sell directly. And there has been a multiplier effect because farmers are also using the plant, which produces value-added commodities such as cheese.

“Tribes do not have the technical expertise or the financing that governments do to improve and manage the resource base,” Ngaido says. “But tribes supply critical social capital and local involvement, without which past state policies have failed. Tribal rangeland management systems depend on rainfall and reciprocity. Seasonal herd movements follow the feed, which makes mobility a very important part of the institutional framework.”

There are many such experiments in the countries under study, Ngaido reports, each one adapting tribal strengths to create an approach specific to the people and places involved. “For the first time, we have a global overview of all of them at once,” Ngaido says. “Teams involved in this research are very excited. They feel that they are contributing to the dry areas in their countries. Tribes are a vital force in rangeland areas. They offer social and economic security. They listen to their members’ concerns. So listening to them is crucial.”

The High Price of Gender Inequality

If the Taliban had been looking for a way to starve Afghanistan's people and retard the nation's development, they could have found no better formula than the heinous misogyny they institutionalized. Women are the key to food security. By persecuting them, the Taliban made it impossible for women, especially widows, to care for themselves and their children. By now the details of the Taliban's domestic terrorism against women are well known: no medical care, no education, no work, no freedom of movement, no exit from the prison their own homes became. This policy feminized poverty and deepened a vicious cycle of pauperization produced by decades of war.

Gender inequality in rights and in access to resources imposes huge costs on the health and well-being of entire societies. In an influential 1990 article, Amartya Sen coined the term “missing women” to describe the great numbers of women in the world who are literally not alive due to family neglect and discrimination. Sen estimated that worldwide there are 100 million missing women, half of whom are in South Asia. Widespread neglect of girls' and women's health, nutrition, education, and care yields high female morbidity and mortality and high child malnutrition.

New work by Food Consumption and Nutrition Division (FCND) research fellow Lisa Smith, FCND director Lawrence Haddad, and Emory University collaborators has established the link between women's status and child nutrition. “We've actually been able to show that the low status of women in many Asian countries affects babies,” Smith says. She is careful to distinguish between women's health, an important factor in child survival, and women's status, “which refers to women's power relative to men, in the households, communities, and nations in which they live. Power is the ability to make choices for oneself and one's family,” she says. “When women's power relative to men is low, they have less control of their own time and household income; their time constraints are tighter and they lack social supports; their knowledge and beliefs are limited due to less exposure to education and information; their mental health, confidence, and self-esteem suffer; their autonomy and freedom of movement may be severely circumscribed; and their access to female-specific health services may be inadequate.”

The researchers constructed an index of women's decisionmaking power relative to their husbands', including household-level data on whether the woman works for

cash, the age of the woman at marriage, and the age and educational differences between husband and wife. Whatever a woman's power relative to men's within the household, women may encounter various barriers outside the home: fewer work opportunities, lower wages, and a narrower range of acceptable behavior. For this reason, the researchers also included a community-level measure of women's status.

Women's nutrition, which Smith et al. found to be strongly associated with status, directly affects the health and nutrition of children. It is well known that poor prenatal maternal nutrition leads to low birth weight, which is the single most important predictor of child survival, and that micronutrient malnutrition affects the pre- and post-natal health of the child. “Women's nutrition affects their energy levels and their ability to breastfeed and carry out essential child care,” Smith says. “Care for women, including prenatal and birthing care, is an important pathway through which women's status affects child nutrition.”

Women's status also affects child nutrition through the quality of a mother's care for her children. “Although women with lower status tend to breastfeed more, the food they give their children is of lower quality; the timing and frequency of feedings is not what's needed for optimal child development; and the health-seeking practices on behalf of children are curtailed,” Smith says. “If a woman can't leave the house, she can't immunize or get medical care for her children.”

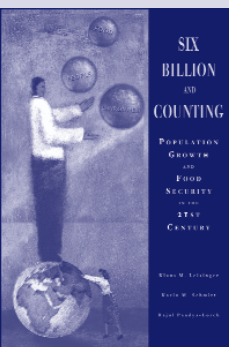
It isn't enough to care for children, important as that is. Women must be cared for too. Smith's research concludes that in regions where women's status is low, the impacts of programs to improve care practices for children, such as child feeding, would be more sustainable when combined with efforts to improve women's status.

Women's education is an important determinant of a child's nutritional status. An earlier study of 63 developing countries by Smith and Haddad shows that gains in women's education accounted for 43 percent of the decline in child malnutrition between 1970 and 1995. Across the developing world, there is a strong positive correlation between mothers' average schooling and child survival.

A study by IFPRI researchers Agnes Quisumbing and John Maluccio in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Ethiopia, and South Africa shows that when women control assets, expenditures on children's education increase and the rate of illness among girls drops. Another Quisumbing study finds that increasing the education and input levels of female farmers to those of male farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa could increase yields as much as 22 percent. In Ivory Coast, John Hoddinott of Dalhousie University and Lawrence Haddad find that increasing women's share of cash income in the household significantly raises the share of the household budget allocated to food and reduces the share spent on alcohol and cigarettes.

“The empowerment of women tends to reduce child neglect and mortality, cut down fertility and overcrowding, and broaden social concerns. . . ,” according to Amartya Sen. IFPRI studies support this view and constitute a strong argument that improving women's status and education is necessary to attain and maintain food security and other development objectives. The human rights of women cannot wait until other economic milestones or development goals have been met. Rather, study after study confirms what should be obvious: guaranteeing women's human rights is crucial for development and a pathway to economic prosperity. ■

NEW PUBLICATIONS



Six Billion and Counting: Population Growth and Food Security in the 21st Century, by Klaus M. Leisinger, Karin M. Schmitt, and Rajul Pandya-Lorch. Distributed for IFPRI by the Johns Hopkins University Press (JHUP). 2002 / 155 pages

Governance and Food Security in an Age of Globalization, by Robert Paarlberg. 2020 Vision Discussion Paper 36. 2002 / 58 pages

Methods for Rural Development Projects, edited by John Hoddinott. First volume in the Food Security in Practice technical guide series. 2001 / 118 pages

Attacking the Double Burden of Malnutrition in Asia and the Pacific, by Stuart Gillespie and Lawrence Haddad. In collaboration with the Asian Development Bank. 2001 / 180 pages



Bangladesh—Rolling up Our Sleeves: Research on the Front Lines. 2002 / 8 pages

Mexico—PROGRESA: Breaking the Cycle of Poverty. 2002 / 8 pages

Impact Evaluation: Assessing the Impact of Policy-Oriented Social Science Research. 2002 / 4 pages

DOWNLOAD or order most IFPRI publications free at www.ifpri.org or contact Publication Services by telephone, fax or e-mail. To order IFPRI books published or distributed by JHUP: tel:800-537-5487; fax: 410-516-6998; email: bkinfo@jhupress.jhu.edu; and web:www.press.jhu.edu/press/books.

Hungry for Learning: Food for Education Programs

Linking food and education could help reduce poverty, food insecurity, and gender injustice in Afghanistan, especially during the transition from emergency relief to development assistance. “For the very poor, food is a powerful motivator,” says Akhter Ahmed, a senior research fellow in the Food Consumption and Nutrition Division, who helped design, monitor, and assess Bangladesh’s successful Food for Education (FFE) program. “We have found that making school attendance a condition of receiving desperately needed food is a formula that works on many levels.” FFE programs support education, which is widely recognized as critical to sustainable poverty reduction. But FFE also aims to benefit children and families in more immediate ways. The situation in Afghanistan is dire. Almost three-quarters of the population is malnourished; many people are starving. Child participation in education is extremely low, with the highest gender gap in the world. Less than one-third of Afghan children are enrolled in primary school. About 38 percent of Afghan boys attend school, but only 3 percent of girls are in the classroom. Half of adult males and 80 percent of adult females are illiterate.

FFE boosts children’s educational levels by increasing school enrollment, promoting attendance, and reducing dropout rates. At the same time, distributing staple foods to families in return for their children’s school attendance improves household food security. “FFE increases girls’ enrollment significantly. Educating today’s girls will empower future generations of Afghan women,” Ahmed emphasizes. Currently, FFE programs target mostly primary school children. “But special components can be designed to serve Afghan adolescents who lost years of education under Taliban rule,” Ahmed says.

FFE programs have two basic elements: Children eat in school (school feeding) or poor families receive food when they send their children to school rather than to work (food for schooling). While both approaches use food to enhance the educational attainment of children, school feeding’s primary objective is to provide meals in order to increase children’s learning capability in the classroom. In contrast, food for schooling’s main goals are to motivate families to send

their children to school and to reduce food shortages within the household. An FFE program that combines these elements can be a powerful tool to create opportunities for families to educate their children and to offer incentives for keeping children in school. “An FFE program that combines school feeding and free food to families accomplishes three things,” Ahmed says. “It attracts children to school, helps children learn by eliminating short-term hunger while they are in the classroom, and reduces chronic hunger and malnutrition for the whole family.”

For the past eight years, IFPRI (with USAID funding) has been working with the Government of Bangladesh to design, implement, and monitor the world’s first food for schooling program. IFPRI’s recent evaluation revealed that the program increased primary school enrollment, encouraged regular attendance, and reduced drop-out rates. Girls’ enrollment increased more than boys’. Calorie and protein consumption in the beneficiary households rose significantly.

“Based on our work in Bangladesh, I believe an FFE program in Afghanistan should combine food for schooling and school feeding,” Ahmed says. “In tailoring such a program for Afghanistan, we would have to assess and address the current educational attainment of children, with a focus on the gender gap; insure high-quality content and instruction; design a program that aggressively targets girls; strive for cost-effectiveness; and strengthen local institutions to run the program efficiently.”

The need is urgent. In February 2002, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent reported that “girls as young as 10 are being offered for marriage in exchange for bags of flour in a desperate struggle for survival in parts of Herat and Farah provinces in western Afghanistan.” Afghanistan needs help to transform the practice of “girls for food” into “food for girls’ education.” An extensive, well-functioning FFE program could do just that. ■

See IFPRI Perspectives, 4th quarter 2001, for a description of Mexico’s PROGRESA program, a social safety net and educational incentive package that gives cash payments directly to mothers in return for their children’s regular school attendance and required healthcare visits.