

Homeland, but no land for Home

A Case Study of Refugees in Towns
Jalalabad, Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan

Wali Mohammad Kandiwal

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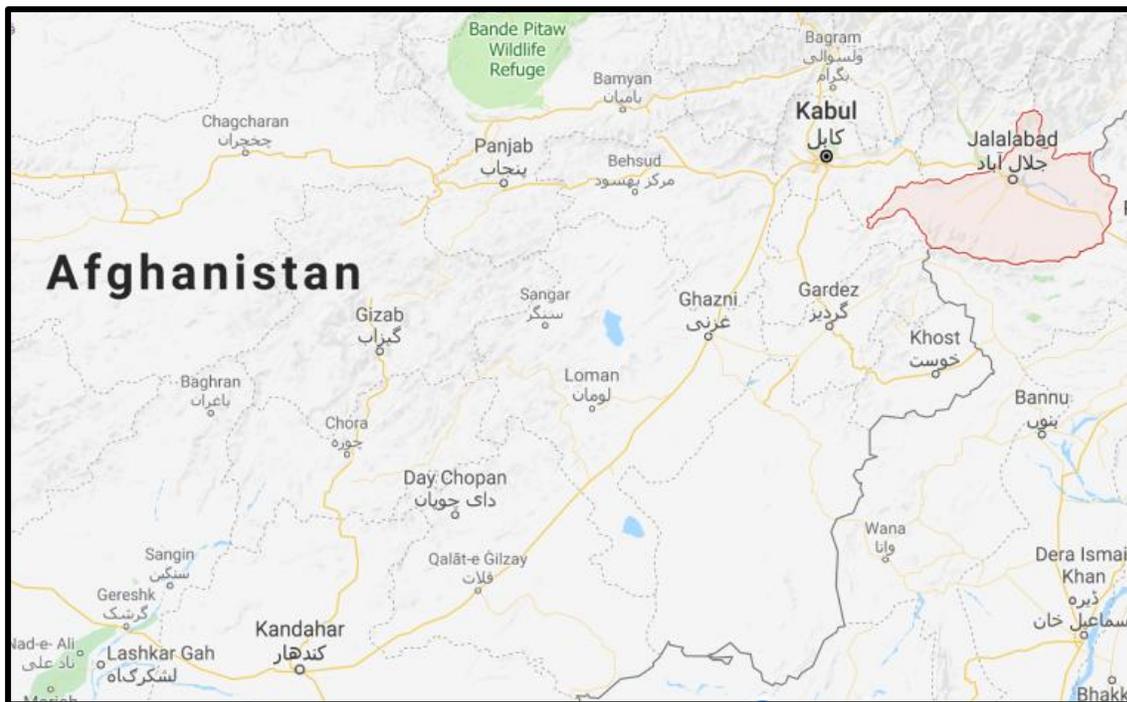
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Location



Afghanistan, Jalalabad city, and Nangarhar Province (red). Base map imagery © Google 2018.

For more background on Afghanistan and Jalalabad, continue to the appendices.

Introduction

This case report explores the challenges faced by Afghan refugees who have returned from Pakistan to Nangarhar Province of Afghanistan, including the city of Jalalabad and its neighboring townships and districts. It explores the returnees' experience of reintegration back into their home country and focuses on their access to land. Land ownership is the main pillar of the Afghan government's official reintegration strategy. The Land Allocation Scheme and Presidential Decree No.104 (rev.)¹ define the land application processes, selection of beneficiaries, and prioritize the neediest among landless returnees. In Nangarhar, it is nearly impossible to have status at the neighborhood level, to find work, or to become socially respected without owning land. This report gives voice to returnees who explain the importance of land from their perspective. The report is based on the author's own experiences as a resident of Nangarhar Province, supplemented by fieldwork in Nangarhar from Oct. 2017- Jan. 2018.

The response of the Afghan government to landless returnees has not addressed the problem adequately, and thus the number of landless returnees and the challenges they face with reintegration are growing. Land issues will become an increasing challenge for the Afghan government and for the reintegration of returnees in the coming years. To avoid a worsening situation, the revised decree should ensure that **only** landless returnees are included. The revision should avoid the misallocation of land and the misuse of land as an incentive or "pull factor" to encourage refugees to return to Afghanistan.

Land: A Pillar of the Reintegration Strategy

For returnees, land ownership is the central pillar of effective reintegration. Providing land for landless returnees is one of the most important aspects of the official reintegration strategy of the Afghan government. Nangarhar province has received the highest number of returnees after Kabul—the capital of Afghanistan—since 2002 and has the largest number of applications by landless returnees pending. The Presidential Decree through which the Land Allocation Scheme was created is currently being revised, so this is a good time to produce evidence to support the strategy.

UNHCR's "Handbook for Repatriation and Reintegration Activities" (2004) is the only reference guide for reintegration in Afghanistan (Majidi, 2011). It envisions reintegration as a process through which differences disappear between returnees and host communities in terms of access to "services, productive assets, and opportunities," (UNHCR 2004, p.5). To achieve this goal, substantial coordination between humanitarian and development institutions is required. Ali (2013, p.52) suggests three categories of reintegration: "(1) economic reintegration (2) housing and landlessness, and (3) social reintegration." The current reintegration strategy pursued by the Afghan government acknowledges these three areas (Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, 2016).

¹ The revised decree is not finalized yet however it was said by one in this study that there might only be very small changes from this point, if there are any at all. The enforced decree was criticized for lacking a transparent application process, corruption, and not reaching the neediest landless returnees.

The Author's Position in the Town and Experience Researching this Case

I am a native of Nangarhar province and have a broad and deep social network that enabled access to respondents and to documentation of government agencies and international organizations. This case report is based on my experiences conducting research on migration, refugee, and returnee issues for the past few years, and having lived as a refugee and a returnee. It is also based on qualitative data collected through conversations with returnees in Nangarhar province, governmental officials, UN agencies, employees of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), representatives of civil society, and journalists. I also conducted a literature review of returnees in Afghanistan prior to field data collection.

This research faced several challenges. First, government officials did not welcome Afghan researchers, or make access to public documents easy, even though these officials have been authorized by national laws to share this information with media and researchers.

I also encountered difficulties having conversations about integration with returnees, who often only opened up at the end of the conversation. These difficulties could be related to expectations of assistance, or that the interviewees were tired of answering many questions, but it is also the case that people are not very familiar with research, so they were suspicious of questions. The need for interpersonal trust in Afghanistan is great, and I was able to use my personal network to develop trust and referrals to other people in the area.

Other difficulties included the lack of data on Nangarhar Province—my desk review found much less data available than initially anticipated. Another challenge was finding female respondents as women and girls avoid talking to males according to local custom. Through much effort, one fourth of the returnees I spoke with were female—not ideal, but some female voices are present in the report, and gendered issues were evidenced in the data.

Finally, it was challenging to find a place to use as an office, and I had limited access to equipment like a voice recorder and camera that a researcher would normally utilize. These items were borrowed from friends to support me.

Reintegration Experiences of Returnees

Afghan refugee returnees do not use the term “reintegration” as conceptualized by the international community, and often do not know the term’s translation in Pashto or Dari. However, they can clearly explain how landlessness affects them financially and socially, and the importance of accessing land and regular housing in becoming settled and included in host communities.

One 55-year-old man originally from the Pachir Agam District of Nangarhar Province returned from Pakistan in 2016 and rented a three-room house on the outskirts of Jalalabad in the Canals area,² paying 4,500 Afs (USD 65) per month. Canals area is located on the southeast of Jalalabad close to the airport. This area was zoned in the 1970s only for agricultural purposes, but because of the increase of the population and huge numbers of returnees, this area is used for housing now. If this man wanted to live in one of the slum areas inside the boundaries of urban Jalalabad and build informally on private land previously used for agriculture, he would need to pay approximately twice what he paid in the Canals area. In the more desirable neighborhoods landlords ask for the first six months or one year’s rent up front, a cost that is impossible for many renters, especially poor families who depend on daily wage labor to pay the cost of living one month at a time. It is very time consuming to find affordable rental houses, and if one is successful, returnees need to go through a slew of procedures for access to services, such as processing school documents for their children, requiring several days. These requirements burden returnees and weaken them financially by taking up time that could be spent working or attending to family members.

Housing rents have risen with the dramatic increase of land prices starting in 2002 with the mass return of refugees. Land grabbing by warlords and their supporters have enabled them to make enormous sums of money in a very short time, with little investment. Consequently, a small minority of individuals own several houses, while many families do not have a single room to stay in. Many returnees therefore live in informal settlements, without documentation and are consequently vulnerable to forced eviction.

Returnees explained that families living in rental houses are not seen as members of the community because it is known that they could leave anytime and are not considered long-term neighbors. This means they are less welcome in events like *Kha Aw Bada* or in community decision-making. *Kha Aw Bada* is a Pashtu term meaning, in this context, *Kha*—a party held because of a happy event such as an engagement or wedding party, and *Bada*—the opposite, an event held because of something sad or sorrowful, as when someone gets injured or dies. In either case, the household invites relatives and neighbors to participate. The role of relatives is to welcome guests and help serve food and tea, while neighbors make their houses available for out of town guests for one or two days, or until the event finishes. In most cases those renting houses are excluded from this role in the community.

Men and women living in rented houses are also excluded from participating in decision-making in the local *Shura* (council). For example, the Community Development Council (CDC), comprised of separate groups of men and women, is the main decision-making body for the design and implementation of development projects. For most decisions, it is the house owners, some of whom live away from that area, who are

² See map on p.10

asked to participate in CDC discussions instead of the person renting their unit and actually living in the neighborhood.

Finally, land plays an important role in building ties through marriage: the first or second question with a marriage proposal is always whether the husband's family owns their home and land. Land is therefore the most important thing linking people to each other in Nangarhar, and land ownership allows one to be a participant in social life. In any social relationship, land has a crucial role, so if the aim of integration is the "disappearance" of inequality between returnees and hosts, this goal is unrealistic without access to land and houses.

The Afghan government and the returnees understand land access very differently (Majidi, 2013). Access to land is understood by the Afghan government as a simple plot where a family can build a house, while returnees think of land as a means not only to build a house, but also as a foundation to access the job market and other services. According to one government official, "the returnees are not only asking for land, but also want to receive land in the city which is not possible because the government has its own plans and needs land in the city for several other programs." Other informants described the Afghan government as pursuing a long-term land allocation policy that seeks to build townships mostly on the edges of cities. This strategy is based on the ballooning population of Jalalabad, which was redesigned and upgraded in the 1970s for a population of 50,000, while today the city has around a million people. The city needs to be expanded in a sustainable way that will allow for further population growth.

The Land Allocation Scheme

Given the centrality of land ownership in the reintegration process, it is worth understanding the attempts by the government of Afghanistan and international backers to allocate land to returnees. The most significant effort has been the Land Allocation Scheme (LAS), launched in 2005 with the endorsement of Presidential Decree No. 104, which was intended to appropriate land for landless returnees and internally displaced persons in the form of house plots. On paper, the LAS was designed to give priority to the neediest cases first. However, several studies have highlighted problems with the Scheme, including corruption and lack of transparency in the beneficiary selection process (MacDonald, 2010; Majidi, 2011; Wily, 2013). The following section focuses on problems inherent to the Land Allocation Scheme, as perceived by returnees themselves.

One-person Authorization Process

The land application process through the LAS is divided into two phases: first, a returnee or IDP must prove their landlessness. Second, a commission consisting of nine organizations reviews the application to verify the first phase was completed without fraud and in alignment with the terms of Presidential Decree No. 104. Also, the commission has the responsibility to select the neediest applicants.

From the perspective of returnees, the claim of landlessness starts with a question on a form distributed to returnees at the border by either government actors or INGOs. Among many other questions, the form asks whether the returnee family has land or not. Some organizations, for instance UNHCR, have

removed this question from the Voluntary Repatriation Form, while others, including the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, still ask it. The question does not, in fact, start the process of applying for land. However, the fact that the question is asked at the border raises the hopes of returnees and creates the perception that they are in a landless disadvantaged category while others living in Afghanistan are not.

To actually begin the land application process, returnees must submit an application in their province of origin. If there is no governmental land to be distributed to returnees there, they will need to apply in the neighboring province. However, further explanation does not exist in the Presidential Decree about which neighboring province should offer land as each province has several neighboring provinces. To qualify for land allocation, all returning families must be able to prove with “credible documentation”³ that there is no land under the name of the applicant, their spouse, or their children.

The decision of proof is made by one person, the *Malak*, who ultimately approves who owns land and who does not in his village. The *Malak* serves as a liaison between the government and his local communities (Kandiwal, 2016), but has no checks or balances, and his judgment is based only on his own moral calculus. In reality, the *Malak* usually does whatever the applicants want because there is either a close personal relationship between them, or a bribe is given.

District officials usually do not have evidence to challenge the *Malak*’s decision because in most cases the applicant’s land document is many decades old. Documents are only issued to an individual, but the names of spouses or children are not listed, creating further verification issues. This is based on the norm of buying and selling most land informally without ownership documents or records in any governmental systems.

Given the power structure of the *Malak*, only the most influential applicants succeed at proving their landlessness status. The more influential an applicant is, the faster they are allocated land. Therefore, who is legally “landless” is not based on need, as outlined in Decree No. 104, but rather based on who is politically connected and influential.

After the *Malak*’s decision, a commission composed of nine representatives—mainly from the government departments—reviews applications to confirm procedural integrity and then prioritize the applicants. However, responsibility goes to DoRR to select applications for the commission to review. Often, members of the commission bring applications of their relatives or friends, and the commission supports the application based on their personal or family network’s interest. This screening process means that unless applicants have personal support within the commission there is no sense in applying at all. Clearly these issues around the transparency and integrity of the application review and prioritization process suggest it does not adhere to the spirit of the No. 104 Presidential Decree.

Enacting the Land Allocation Scheme

Initially, 60 Land Allocation Sites (LAS) were planned in uncultivated governmental land to support the reintegration process for returnees and IDPs. However, the LAS plan was initiated more than a decade ago, and today only 29 LAS are functioning. In Nangarhar Province, the first LAS was launched in 2006 in

³ Accepted credible documents are: the “Afghan Tazkera (ID card) VRF, Ration Pass, IOM card given at the border, children school card studied in Pakistan, vaccination card, or Gat pass given on the border,” (DoRR of Nangarhar, 2018).

Sheikh Mesri— located in the southwest of Jalalabad City on the official border of the Surkh Rod District— where 14,000 plots were distributed to landless refugee returnees. Sheikh Mesri was followed by another LAS called Chamtalah—located between the Khogyani and Surkh Rod Districts in the northwest of the city of Jalalabad—which was planned for 5,500 jireb (1,100 hectares), however 2,000 *jireb* had been grabbed by neighboring communities who refused to allow the government to redistribute it. Instead, these neighboring communities distributed this land among themselves. So far, the government has distributed a total of 22,000 house plots (14,000 in Sheikh Mesri and 8,000 in Chamtalah) to landless returnees through the LAS in Nangarhar Province, which means only one seventh of promised plots have been provided in over ten years.

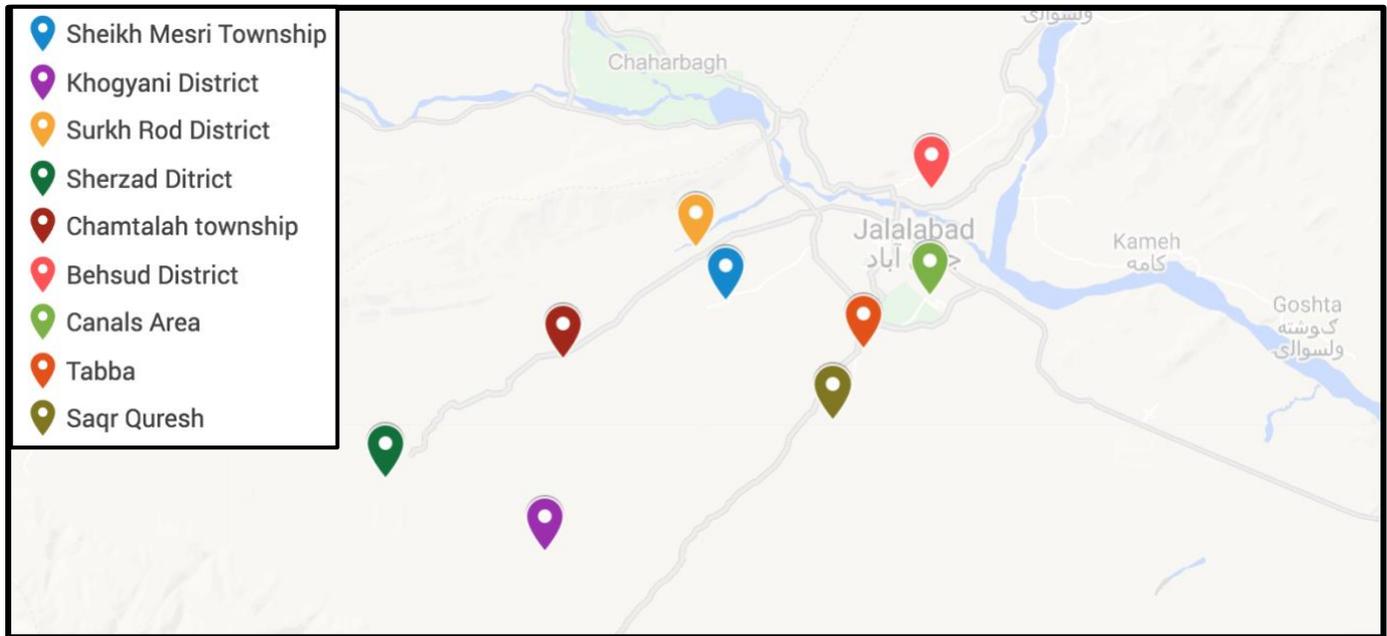
The two LAS in Nangarhar province



Chamtala LAS



Sheikh Mesri LAS



Sheikh Mesri and Chamtalah Townships. Base map imagery © Google 2019.

This distribution took place under the auspices of the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR), which played a central role in the process and was the main reason why the LAS was so slow to deploy and did not achieve its goals. MoRR lacked the capacity to manage a nationwide program of this scale, and MoRR officials did not have expertise on land-related issues. Another problem was the geographical isolation of the LAS in Kabul, far away from the implementing cities, as well as the Ministry's lack of basic facilities to conduct business (Majidi & Ingrid, 2011). Sheikh Mesri is a good example of these problems, as a third of the LAS are still unfulfilled, and the only progress is on a few plots where just the four walls were constructed to prevent squatting.

Another example of the limited progress by MoRR is the Khanaky LAS, which is located in the Behsud District of Nangarhar province. This LAS is planned to be constructed in 3,000 *jireb* land and will give 12,000-14,000 house plots depending on the size of the plots, which has not yet been specified. In Khanaky, on paper the recipient will receive the land, house plot, and the key of a complete house with all basic services. This might be a response to criticism from the previous LAS in regard to the lack of basic services. It is difficult to anticipate when these houses will be distributed, as the only progress after four years has been the selection of the land and design plans for its development. Likewise, it is questionable how possible it will be for the Afghan government and its international backers to financially support fully completed houses and services for all returned families. The situation outlined here—including the enormous number of unfulfilled applications and the ineffective and slow response of the government—scream for a deeper discussion and analysis of the system dealing with land distribution to returnees.

Incorporating Lessons Learned & New Challenges

In September 2017, the Presidential Decree No. 104 was revised by a commission composed of the government agencies (including ARAZI and MoRR), as well as international organizations including UNHCR in Kabul. The revised draft from 19 September 2017 was reviewed for this report. The draft shows two fundamental changes in regard to the application and beneficiary selection process.

First, the criteria to be considered eligible for land provision have been loosened. Any returnee family—whether landless or not—can submit their application for land but must meet a set of Basic Eligibility Criteria. These criteria include that the applicant must prove their exile and return back to Afghanistan by presenting a document such as the MoRR's Returnee Certificate, the Voluntary Repatriation Form issued by UNHCR, an IOM Beneficiary Card, or a Proof of Assistance Card from humanitarian agencies to the "Returnee Information Centres." The Returnee Information Centres are a set of bureaucracies that will be "established and managed by the Provincial Beneficiary Selection Consortium in the province where the family unit wants to receive land," (Revised version of the No.104 decree, 2017, p.5). While this set of criteria is more egalitarian, it will add significantly more administrative load to the already over-burdened shoulders of the Afghan government.

Second, returnee families now have the choice to apply for land in any province they want. This is widely perceived as a better reflection of the Constitution of Afghanistan, which says that any Afghan is free to choose where to reside in the country. This addresses the contradiction between the constitution's support of freedom of movement and the current version of No. 104 that does not allow free choice on where to resettle. However, this change could create harm by encouraging more returnees to settle in provinces such as Nangarhar and other urbanized centers that are already stressed from hosting a large number of returnees.

This policy could play out to be advantageous or disadvantageous. On one hand, additional returnees could bring more urban development in the four or five urbanized hubs of the country, particularly Jalalabad, as well as allow returnees to go to urbanized areas with the greatest capacity for services, housing, jobs, and infrastructures. However, on the other hand this extra burden could put more pressure on these areas' public services, housing, and job markets. Increased numbers of returnees can cause competition among applicants in applying for land in urban centers, and unsurprisingly this competition leads to more corruption and abuse of power in the land allocation process. This dynamic is already occurring, for example an agreement between the provincial government and the people of Behsood District that allocated the plots of the Khanaky Land Allocation Site exclusively to natives of Nangarhar.

Finally, many individuals I spoke with believed that the revision to No. 104 is being driven by political motivations, not genuine humanitarian goals. The Afghan government is being pressured by foreign governments to encourage refugees to come back to Afghanistan—especially from Pakistan and Iran—as these refugees are perceived by foreign governments as a source of regional insecurity.

Conclusion

It is estimated that more than 6 million Afghans have returned since 2002, although more than 4 million are still in exile. The dominant challenge for returnees is lack of access to land and proper housing, which form the foundation of social and economic connections to host communities. However, there is no recording system for tracking land ownership at the national, provincial, or city level, and there is an information gap about what percentage of returnees are claiming they have no land. Therefore, all stakeholders are acting on assumed figures based on anecdotal observations leading to differences in perspectives between the Afghan government and returnees themselves.

Returnees in Nangarhar believe that land is the most important source of trust, access to services, livelihoods, and social value. Without land or a proper house, one cannot participate in local decision-making processes and is not considered a part of the community. Existing approaches like the Land Allocation Scheme from 2005 have been inadequate and widely criticized for inefficiency and lack of transparency in the beneficiary selection process. There is corruption and ignorance among officials about the realities of how LAS is implemented and experienced by applicants.

While the government of Afghanistan has begun to revise the Presidential Decree behind the LAS, challenges remain, and it is likely that these problems will not be solved in the near future. More likely, these problems will grow as the number of applicants increases and demand for urban housing expands, especially for poor families who do not have anyone in their family network holding influential positions in the government. This situation forces returnees to find a living space by themselves, often putting them in the cheapest living space possible in peripheral informal settlements. This expansion of informal settlements in turn creates tensions between the returnees and host communities, keeps them spatially and socially separated, and makes it more difficult for governments to create sustainable programming for reintegration.

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Appendix A: Country Background: Afghanistan as a Mobile Society

Currently, around a quarter of the total population of Afghanistan is displaced either across international borders or internally. Afghans have historically been a highly mobile population with nomadic roots, and seasonal migration was an integral part of their lives and livelihoods for centuries (Monsutti, 2006). The scale of mobility has increased since conflict erupted in the late 1970s. Since then, mobility became a survival factor, but was also motivated by other factors such as seeking a better life or livelihood. Afghans became the largest refugee population after World War II, distressful record they held until the outpouring of refugees from the conflict in Syria.

Today, the Afghan diaspora is in some 75 countries (Schmeidl, 2014) with the neighboring countries of Pakistan and Iran hosting the majority of the global Afghan refugee population, perhaps as many as 4 million. Thousands of Afghans have sought asylum in Europe and beyond.

Internal displacement is a prominent feature of the Afghan conflict and it is on the rise. From January 2017 to January 2018, the UN recorded 452,529 new displaced persons in Afghanistan, and overall the number of IDPs is approximately 1.5 million (UNOCHA, 2017). In addition, more than 6 million Afghan refugees have returned, mainly from Pakistan and Iran. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has assisted some 5 million of these returnees, the largest repatriation project UNHCR has facilitated since it was founded.

However, the accuracy of returnee numbers is questionable, as there has always been back and forth movements encouraged by various assistance packages (Turton and Marsden, 2002). I myself have witnessed this back and forth movement of returnees, and personally know relatives who came to Afghanistan and went back to Pakistan several times between 2002 and 2004 to get assistance. However, it was not the assistance alone that encouraged people to move.

It was difficult for returnees to make the decision to stay in Afghanistan or go back to Pakistan because they could not trust that Afghanistan would be a better place than Pakistan in terms of security and work opportunities. It is difficult to find detailed and updated information on the ethnicity of returnees; however, UNHCR's assisted repatriation data show that more than half the returnees the agency assisted between 2002 and 2008—the era of mass return—were ethnically Pashtun (UNHCR, 2008).

Ethnicity	Pashtun	Tajik	Hazara	Uzbek	Turkman	Others	Unknown
Percentage	57%	25%	8%	4%	2%	4%	16246

(UNHCR, 2008).

Appendix B: City Background: Returnees to Nangarhar Province

Nangarhar Province is in eastern Afghanistan, sharing borders with five other provinces: Kunar, Laghman, Paktia, Logar, and Kabul, and also borders Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The capital city is Jalalabad, which serves as the urban hub for the eastern region. The majority of the population of Nangarhar is Pashtun, with three main sub-tribes: Khogyani, Shinwari, and Mohmand. Non-Pashtun ethnicities include Pashai, Gojer, and Arab. Of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, Nangarhar has the highest number of refugee returnees: about 80% of the returned population from Pakistan in 2016 settled in Nangarhar (Pajhwak, 2016). Returnees now represent 27% of the population of Nangarhar (IOM, 2017). Returnees who are not native to Nangarhar make up one third of the returned population (Muzhary, 2017).

According to UNHCR, 16,612 individuals returned to the eastern region of Afghanistan during 2017, 78% of whom returned to Nangarhar Province. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) also reported that 474,000 undocumented Afghans returned from Pakistan and Iran between January and November of 2017.

However, there is a lack of accurate population figures for the entire province, and Jalalabad city specifically. Different organizations use different figures, and even governmental departments have no consensus (Jalalabad City Profile, 2013). The majority of Nangarhar is Pashtun, so unsurprisingly most returnees were also Pashtun, however, UNHCR indicates that Nangarhar was the intended destination for other ethnicities including Tajik, Uzbek, Hazar, and Turkman who were not residents prior to exile. The UNHCR's data do not include detailed figures of these ethnicities, which raises the question why returnees chose to settle in Nangarhar and not their province of origin.

Based on my experiences and conversations, most returnees do not go back to their places of origin because of security, lack of employment in rural areas, and lack of access to land (Majidi, 2011). Instead, returnees go to urban centers, mostly informal settlements, which are not legally documented by the municipality but belong to the government. In Nangarhar there are 26 informal settlements: 15 are located on the outskirts of Jalalabad, and the rest border the neighboring districts of Behsood and Surkh Rod (Reach, 2017).

Landless Returnees

One estimate (which lacks a source) is that more than 90% of refugees still in Pakistan claim they are landless in Afghanistan (Macdonald 2010). However, my interviews with key informants and returnees suggested that neither the Afghan government nor NGOs have any system to record returnees' claims of landlessness. Thus, no one has an accurate number of landless returnees. This lack of data means policymakers and practitioners use assumptions about the landless returnee population to inform their decisions, rather than real figures.

My interviews indicate that while returnees *claim* landlessness, not all of them are in fact landless. Some individuals estimated that about half of the returnees do not have land. However, this figure simply illustrates how large the knowledge gap is pertaining to returnees. A very large number of applications for land by refugee returnees has been pending for years at the DoRR in Nangarhar Province, and this number has increased since the "Land Allocation Scheme" was created.

Most returnees claim that either they were landless pre-exile or that their family size became larger so that the land of their forefathers cannot accommodate them anymore. The Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR) of Nangarhar has data on the number of applications, but very little other contextual information. Applications are processed and approved, but no review ensures that the document processing occurred properly without any falsification or fraud. The number of applications at the DoRR in Nangarhar is between 136,000 and 160,000, however, other important information on the applications is missing. For instance:

- There are people who have received *Tarufa*—the first document of land issued by the government, which is followed by other documents for full land ownership—but still did not receive plots, and they have been waiting for years.
- Other categories of applications are delayed in processing, waiting for the signature of the Director of DoRR, or waiting on approval of their landlessness.
- Some informants estimate that tens of thousands of applicants gave up on the process because they got nowhere after approaching the DoRR several times. They are waiting for the system to improve and become more transparent before reengaging. This means there are a large number of undocumented but pending applications.

Clearly the knowledge gap about landless returnees must be filled in order to develop a strategy that addresses the challenges of reintegration.

Appendix C: Interview List

Sector	Organization	No.
Government of Afghanistan	Directorate of Refugees, and Repatriation (DoRR)	2
	Directorate of Trade and Industry	1
	ARAZI - Afghanistan Independent Land Authority	1
	Advisory office of the provincial governor	1
	Provincial council	1
Non-Governmental Organizations	IOM	1
	NRC	4
	Independent Human Rights Commission	4
	UN-Habitat	1
	Civil society / Journalist	3
Refugee Returnees		12
Gender (all categories)		F= 8 M=23
Age range (all categories)		22 – 50

About the RIT Project

The **Refugees in Towns (RIT)** project promotes understanding of the migrant/refugee experience in urban settings. Our goal is to understand and promote refugee integration by drawing on the knowledge and perspective of refugees and locals to develop deeper understanding of the towns in which they live. The project was conceived and is led by Karen Jacobsen. It is based at the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University and funded by the Henry J. Leir Foundation.

Our goals are twofold

First, through our case studies and reports we are building a global data base to help us analyze and understand the process of immigrant/refugee integration. The cases provide a range of local insights about the many different factors that enable or obstruct integration, and the ways in which migrants and hosts co-exist, adapt, and struggle in urban spaces. We draw our cases from towns in resettlement countries, transit countries, and countries of first asylum around the world. Our long-term goal is to build a theory of integration from the ground up.

Second, the RIT project seeks to support community leaders, aid organizations, and local governments in shaping policy, practice, and interventions. We engage policymakers and community leaders through town visits, workshops, conferences, and participatory research that identifies needs in their communities, encourages dialogue on integration, and shares good practices and lessons learned.

Why now?

The United States—among many other refugee-hosting countries—is undergoing a shift in its refugee policy through travel bans and the suspension of parts of its refugee program. Towns across the U.S. are responding in different ways: some resist national policy changes by declaring themselves “sanctuary cities,” while others support travel bans and exclusionary policies. In this period of social and political change, we seek to deepen our understanding of integration and the ways in which refugees, migrants, and their hosts interact. Our RIT project draws on and gives voice to both refugees and hosts in their experiences with integration around the world.

For more on RIT

Our website contains many case studies and reports from other towns and urban neighborhoods around the world, and we regularly release new reports.

www.refugeesintowns.org

About the Author

Wali Mohammad Kandiwal is a native of the Nangarhar province, which is located in eastern Afghanistan. He received his Master's in Humanitarian Action from Geneva, Switzerland, and his Bachelor's in Political Science in Afghanistan. He has been working with several national and international organizations for more than a decade, primarily as a journalist and researcher. Currently, he is working as an independent research consultant, mostly on the issues of migration, refugees, returnees, IDPs, resettlement, human trafficking, and local governance. Some of his publications are available online on the websites of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), Crossroads Asia, University of Bonn Germany, and the Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration journal.

Email: w.kandiwal@gmail.com

Refugees in Towns is a project of the Feinstein International Center. More information on the project, including more case study reports, is available at <https://www.refugeesintowns.org/>

The Feinstein International Center is a research and teaching center based at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University. Our mission is to promote the use of evidence and learning in operational and policy responses to protect and strengthen the lives, livelihoods, and dignity of people affected by or at risk of humanitarian crises.

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