

On the Edge and in Between: Community and Policy Responses to Shocks in the Borderland Regions of Afghanistan - A Qualitative Research Study



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ABOUT THE X-BORDER LOCAL RESEARCH NETWORK

In Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, conflict and instability endure in contested border regions where local tensions connect with regional and global dynamics. With the establishment of the X-Border Local Research Network, The Asia Foundation, the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, the Rift Valley Institute, and their local research partners are working together to improve our understanding of political, economic, and social dynamics in the conflict-affected borderlands of Asia, the Middle East, and the Horn of Africa and the flows of people, goods, and ideas that connect them. This five-year program, initiated in 2018 as part of the Cross-Border Conflict: Evidence, Policy and Trends (XCEPT) project, produces research to inform more effective policymaking and programming. It builds, maintains, and expands local research networks in some of the most remote and difficult conflict-affected regions. Finally, it supports improvements in local research methods and capacity.

DISCLAIMER

The report was prepared for The Asia Foundation as part of the X-Border Local Research Network, with the support of UK aid from the UK government. All views are those of the research team and are not necessarily shared by The Asia Foundation or the UK government.



I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The livelihood strategies of communities living within the vicinity of border areas of Afghanistan are distinctive to the region. Unlike elsewhere in Afghanistan, borderland settlements have historically had close access to neighboring Pakistan. This proximity has facilitated a historical back and forth movement of Afghans to maintain a way of life. Given their dependence on the border, these communities remain vulnerable to policy changes and other disruptions that may occur at the frontier. These disruptions may be linked to pre-existing dynamics in the region such as Afghanistan's diplomatic relationship with Pakistan, its underdeveloped infrastructure, local insurgent activity, etc. This study assembled key populations in four border districts in Nangarhar, Paktia, and Khost to document the effects of recent borderland events and policies, including the 24/7 opening of Torkham Gate and other policies intended to regulate the movement of people across the border (i.e. visa restrictions).

Analysis of qualitative data collected from population groups that reside and operate along the border suggest that the 24/7 opening of Torkham gate has been beneficial to stakeholders in Muhmand Dara. The gate opening has alleviated traffic delays and partially mitigated the adverse economic effects of stricter border. Other recent changes including strict ID requirements for crossing, the construction of the border fence, and the outbreak of Covid-19 has devastated trade and livelihoods in the region. Respondents suggest that strictly enforced visa and passport requirements for crossing the border has prompted lengthy and expensive obstacles to crossing. IDI and FGD respondents also emphasized that the erection of the barbed wire fencing of the Durand line has prevented informal trade and travel critical to the local economy of the border areas.

The outbreak of Covid-19 also had severely debilitating socio-economic impacts on all four of the border areas studied. Not only did the outbreak bring a deadly virus to the area, but the pandemic also led to border closure, the suspension of cross border trade, and the lockdown of shops, schools, and other key borderland establishments. These abrupt shocks halted almost all income opportunities in the area, which is largely dependent on the business and trade activities that occur near the border.

Analysis of the qualitative data collected from this study prompt the following policy recommendations that would improve the livelihoods of local borderland communities:

- Requirements for Passport and Visa should be suspended for border area locals to improve the economic well-being of border locals dependent on income opportunities on the other side of the border. At minimum, visa and passport requirements should be removed for medical patients from the border areas.



- Promotion of Ghulam Khan Pass in Gurbuz, Khost and Kharlachi Pass in Dand Patan, Paktia to official gates and transit points similar to Torkham and Chaman gates.
- Improvements to healthcare infrastructure in remote border areas of Afghanistan.
- Investment in education infrastructure in remote border areas of Afghanistan.
- Increasing the availability of job opportunities and economic support from the government and the donor community by providing locals resources to start businesses and expand existing ones.
- Sustained rehabilitation of forestry resources in areas along the border, especially in Tanai, Khost.
- Improved access and provision of basic resources including potable water, water for irrigation, and electricity.
- Price controls on certain goods exported from Pakistan into Afghanistan.

II. INTRODUCTION

The Asia Foundation (TAF) has partnered with the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center and the Rift Valley Institute to establish a FCDO-funded research program: X-Border Local Research Network. The research program focuses its study on conflict-affected border regions and the transnational flows of goods, ideas, and people that connect them.

Last year, TAF commissioned ACSOR to conduct a preliminary, mixed-methods study of the Trade and Livelihoods in Afghanistan-Pakistan Borderlands. The project consisted of a representative survey of 1,525 respondents in the Afghan districts of Spin Boldak and Muhmand Dara, and qualitative Key Informant Interviews with local stakeholders in the region. The research provided empirical evidence of the reliance of Afghan border settlements on cross-border trade. It also described some of the impacts of stricter border controls implemented by Pakistan since 2017 (requirement of a passport and visa for incoming Afghans; occasional border closures). Although local residents recognize that porous borders may contribute to insecurity, restrictions on cross-border movement (i.e. border closure) present a greater threat to their livelihood strategies.

In an effort to expand on the results of the initial study, TAF has commissioned a joint study to document the impact of recent policies on border communities in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The objective of this study is to document the effects of the following borderland events on the livelihoods of border communities, trade, and security:

- Recent administrative and security-related restrictions on cross-border movement (visas etc.)
- The effectiveness of the 24/7 opening of the Torkham gate, a measure intended to alleviate traffic congestion and partially mitigate the adverse effects of stricter border controls.



- Other policies intended to restrict or regulate the movement of people across the border (visa restrictions etc.)
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the border region

Research findings will contribute to an initial assessment of the effectiveness of these policies, and their intended or unintended effects on economic development, trust in state and support to peace efforts in border areas.

The research was conducted by ACSOR-Surveys, based in Kabul, Afghanistan, on behalf of the Asia Foundation. Funding for the project comes from the UK government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), and the research seeks to establish a baseline for future research in the border regions, as well as to guide future UK development programming. D3: Designs, Data, Decisions, ACSOR's parent company, provided support in terms of sample design, data review, reporting, and analysis.

BACKGROUND

Although they have been divided by the imposition of the Durand Line in the 19th Century, the Pashtun communities on either side of the border remain linked by trade, family ties, culture, religion, and history. Although relations between the two countries are often strained, the Foundation's 2019 cross border study in Afghanistan found that many people continued to cross the border for a variety of reasons, including for trade, such as buying or selling products, fleeing violence, medical treatment, marriage, and numerous others. From the 1980s to the 2010s, millions of Afghans crossed into Pakistan to seek relative safety, but since 2014, many have been returned, sometimes voluntarily but often not.

The people of the border region face numerous, interrelated challenges, including a long-running insurgency, poverty, lack of access to resources and services, and weak governance. Unlike elsewhere in Afghanistan, borderland settlements have historically had close access to neighbouring Pakistan. This proximity has sustained a fundamental back and forth movement of Afghans residing on either side of the border to maintain a way of life. The Asia Foundation's 2019 cross border survey found that 69% percent of those living in the border regions of Torkham and Chaman reported crossing the border at least once in the past year.

The harsh, mountainous geography and poor infrastructure of the border region makes imposition of rule of law by either state difficult. In the past three years, the Pakistani government has strengthened its control over the area by implementing multiple policies to regulate cross border travel in the area, including the 24/7 opening of Torkham gate, the requirement of visas and passports for travel into Pakistan, and the construction of a barbed wire fence. Given the area's high dependence on the border, these policies have direct impacts on borderland settlements located along the frontier.

Policies like the construction of a fence and requirement of ID documentation have made economic development difficult, and most inhabitants of the border region survive at a



subsistence or post-subsistence level. However, cross-border trade does create opportunities for at least some inhabitants of the border region. Afghanistan's formal economy is dependent on imports and exports that pass through the border crossings Torkham gate and secondary gates along the border in Paktia and Khost. Results for the 2019 border study suggested that 71% of borderland respondents indicated that all or a large part of the business activities in their community depend on cross-border trade. Similarly, more than half of the respondents in that survey (56%) indicated that all or a large part of the well-being of their family was dependent on cross border trade.

The 2019 study also found that the informal economy in Muhmand Dara and Dand Patan was often dependent on unregistered, unofficial trade that traversed the border at or near the official crossings. Policies instituted by the Pakistani government have had a serious impact on the region's informal travel and its associated livelihood strategies. Taken together, these facts make a better understanding of Afghanistan's border regions vital to understanding its current situation and its place in the region. Moreover, past research suggests that the fragile economy's dependence on the border makes it susceptible to disruptions and challenges that hinder their capacity to benefit from the border. These disruptions include, insecurity, border closure, and restrictions on border crossing. The outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic has had serious impacts on the living conditions of locals in the area due to the border closure resulting from the outbreak. The requirement of passports and visas to cross the border as well as the recent construction of a barbed wire fence by Pakistani forces has introduced major obstacles to both formal and informal border crossing. Ultimately, the main challenge of the people is border closures or restrictions on crossing the border because many locals have historically depended on business, trade, healthcare, and education opportunities in Pakistan. When the border closes or access to crossing is limited, many become unemployed, have no available source of income, and lose access to healthcare and education. Respondents ask that the government increase funding to implement infrastructure projects and to provide basic services and economic opportunity support to the area.

The border area is isolated and deprived of electricity, irrigation systems, dams, water wells, roads, and bridges. The underdeveloped region lacks infrastructure and the skilled human capital necessary for effective resource provision in the area. The area does not have proper amenities for professionals, such as doctors or educators, resulting in few available clinics and schools. Results from the 2019 study suggest that the scarcity of resources in their region has led people to travel elsewhere to receive healthcare or education, and respondents in the current research frequently mention travelling either to Pakistan or to other parts of Afghanistan to access these services. Respondents in the in the 2019 quantitative border survey of Muhmand Dara and Spin Boldak outlined a variety of problems in the local area, the most frequently mentioned include electricity (35%), drinking water (24%), and schools (22%).



III. METHODOLOGY

1. The field period for the 2020 X-Border Study was interrupted by the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) in Afghanistan. The borderland areas targeted for this study are particularly vulnerable to the virus, given the high volume of traffic traveling through the local area, inadequate health services, limited infrastructure, and weak governance, which makes it difficult for the Afghan government and its international partners to assist those in need. The circumstances surrounding the coronavirus in Afghanistan led to fast-changing circumstances early during the field process that prompted ACSOR staff to take extensive measures to protect the health and safety of our interviewers and respondents. Our staff worked quickly to develop new field protocols to protect the health and safety of both our field staff and study participants. These changes include restrictions on travel between the research site and Kabul's main office, which has prompted moderators to be trained electronically via skype. Our interviewers are highly trained individuals who have participated in comprehensive training for this project online, and draw on experience from numerous previous research projects. ACSOR also shifted its transcription to occur at the research site and be transmitted electronically via email and other cloud-sharing systems to the Kabul staff. Masks, gloves, and other important hygiene and safety training were provided to staff and respondents for every in-depth interview and focus group discussion conducted during the study.
2. The outbreak of the pandemic and the government mandated lockdown delayed the field period of this study by roughly 2 months. ACSOR worked consistently to evaluate the situation to determine the best course of action for the study. Following a successful pilot exercise and approval from TAF-Afghanistan, ACSOR moved forward with field to complete a total of 124 IDIs.
3. The In-Depth Interview and Focus Group Discussion guides were formulated in close collaboration with TAF staff, based on the research objectives and past research conducted for the study.
4. The in-depth interview guide was developed to allow moderators to conduct semi-structured interviews with respondents.
5. The focus group guides were designed to be conducted in each district with key community figures who each bring a unique perspective in understanding the dynamics of the border region. Due to the difficulty in finding literate women who are well-informed about the overall situation at the border, ACSOR conducted a 3-person female focus group (midwife, nurse, and teacher) in Torkham.
6. Each moderator was required to complete a moderator guide after each interview or focus group with information about the overall atmosphere, respondent temperament, reaction to the questions, and other relevant information.
7. Target respondents varied across socio-economic status ranging from wage laborers working near the border senior officials in the relevant provincial centers, districts, and border towns. Many of the target respondents were specific people recommended to ACSOR by the Asia Foundation.



8. In some cases, the Asia Foundation and ACSOR staff worked together to gain access to respondents, while in others, ACSOR used personal contacts and references to schedule interviews.
9. All IDIs (n=120) and FGDs (n=5) were conducted in-person by trained ACSOR moderators. ACSOR called ahead to schedule interviews and arrange access.
 - Given the cultural context of Afghanistan, ACSOR was not able to secure an even gender split across the respondent types defined for this project. 92 IDI respondents were male and 28 of the IDI respondents were female.
 - Four FGDs with seven male participants were conducted in each province.
 - One all-female FGD was conducted in Muhmand Dara district.
10. ACSOR was able to complete 124 In-Depth Interviews against a planned target of 120.
11. The IDIs were conducted between May 24 – June 13th with most of the IDIs conducted towards the beginning of the timeframe. FGDs were conducted between July 19th – August 1st.
12. Following the field period, ACSOR staff worked to review audio recordings and transcripts of all interviews and focus group discussions before conducting analysis of the data.

RESPONDENT PROFILES

The in-depth interview respondent categories selected for this survey are listed below. As members of borderland communities, each of these populations have distinct experience of interaction with Pakistan and have historically engaged in transnational travel to maintain their social and economic livelihoods.

IDI Respondents 30 per district:

- Provincial officials (2)
 - Man and woman
- Wage laborers/temporary jobs along the border (4)
 - Seasonal wage laborers who work in Pakistan (2)
 - Wage laborers in on Afghan side of the border (2)
- Community/traditional leaders (3)
 - Tribal Elders (2)
 - Religious scholar (1)
- Farmers (2)
- Housewives (3)
- Local shura members (2)
- Teachers (2)
 - One man and one woman
- Medical patients seeking treatment across the border (2)
 - One man and one woman
- Students seeking education across the border (2)



- One man and one woman
- Businessmen operating along the border (4)
 - Shopkeepers (2)
 - Traders (2)
- Border Police and Customs officials (1)
- Truck Drivers (3)

Focus Group Discussion Participants:

A total of five focus group discussions were conducted with people who live in the district. One FGD with seven participants was conducted per district with an additional fifth all female FGD with the following types of respondents recruited for each:

1. Teachers
2. Medical professionals
3. Shura members
4. Businessmen
5. NGO workers

RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

ACSOR uses a variety of methods to recruit participants for qualitative research. The most common approach is through a use of recruitment screener questionnaires and chain referral sampling (also known as “snowball sampling”).



IV. PROFILE OF RESEARCH SITES

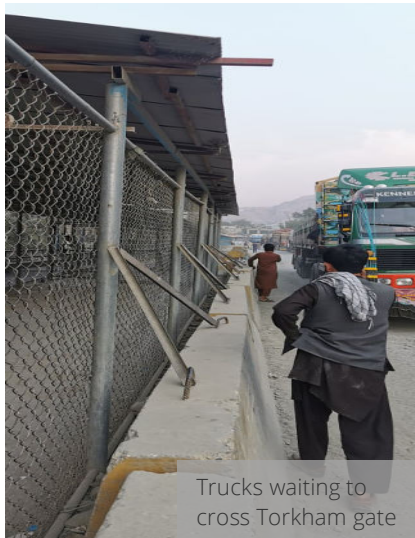
Semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with a variety of border area locals and government officials offered insight into the reasons for border crossing across the four selected research sites. Despite their commonality as border towns, each of these areas have different levels of resources and crossing access that ultimately impact the frequency and reasons for crossing to Pakistan. Four borderland research sites with varying border passes were selected as research sites for the study: Torkham crossing in Muhmand Dara is an official crossing point on the frontier. The Ghulam Khan pass in Gurbuz is the site of a secondary border crossing, and Dand Patan is a fenced border town with a small crossing in the area. Finally, Tanai is a downstream town along the border with no official border crossing.





MOHMAND DARA DISTRICT - NEAR TORKHAM GATE, NANGARHAR PROVINCE

Mohmand Dara district is the site of the largest border crossing between Afghanistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan, Torkham gate. This is a major trade route linking Kabul, Jalalabad, and Peshawar. Located in Eastern Afghanistan, the district has seven major villages with the overwhelming majority (99.7%) of residents belonging to the Pashtun ethnic group.¹ According to the 2020 National Statistics and Information Authority of Afghanistan, the district is a rural area that has a total population of 50,752.²



Trucks waiting to cross Torkham gate



Wage laborer working near Torkham gate



Trucks waiting to cross Torkham

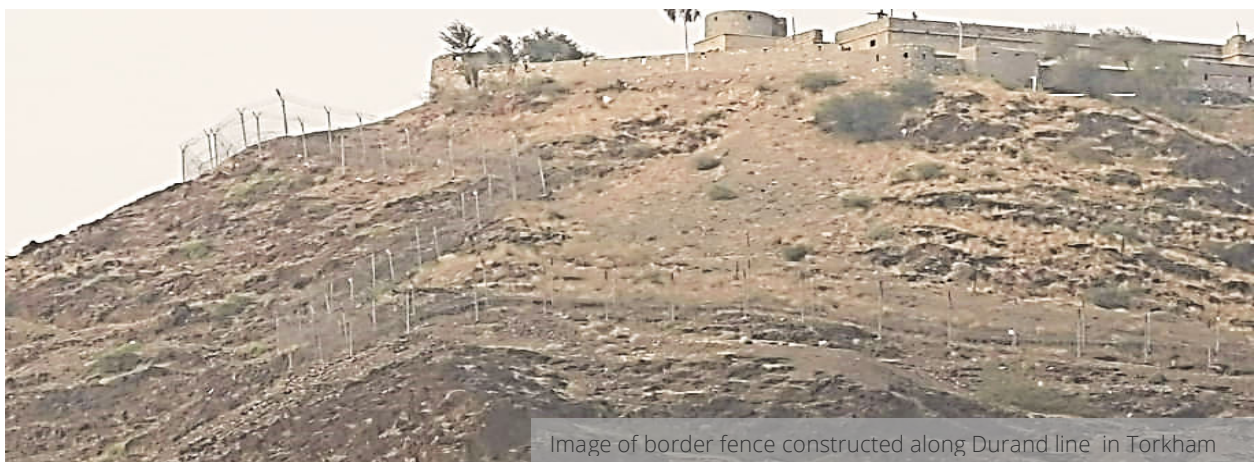


Image of border fence constructed along Durand line in Torkham

¹ The Asia Foundation, ACSOR, and UKAid. n.d. "Trade and Livelihoods in the Afghanistan - Pakistan Borderlands." Asia Foundation. [1] <https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Trade-and-Livelihoods-in-the-Afghanistan-Pakistan-Borderlands.pdf>.

² National Statistic and Information Authority (Afghanistan). 2020. "Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021." National Statistic and Information Authority (NSIA). <http://www.data.gov.af/>.



DAND PATAN DISTRICT – NEAR KHARLACHI PASS, PAKTIA PROVINCE –

Dand Patan is the site of a remote, fenced border town, with a small crossing between Afghanistan and Kurram in Pakistan. Dand Patan is a rural district located in South central Afghanistan with a total population of 30,027.³

Dand Patan is the heartland of the Mangal tribe of Pashtuns.⁴



Kharlachi pass in Dand Patan



Trucks with goods near Kharlachi pass



Trucks waiting to cross at Kharlachi pass



Shops and traffic along Kharlachi pass

³ ibid

⁴ "Afghan Biographies." 2020. Dand Patan District Paktia Province. http://www.afghan-bios.info/index.php?option=com_afghanbios&id=2094&task=view&total=4310&start=940&Itemid=2.



GURBUZ DISTRICT – NEAR GHULAM KHAN PASS, KHOST PROVINCE

Gurbuz district is site of Ghulam Khan pass, a secondary border crossing between Afghanistan and North Waziristan in Pakistan. The rural district is located in the southeast of Khost province with a population of 29,627.⁵ Gurbuz is located 20 kilometres to the southeast of Khost city with a majority Pashtun population. Most residents in Gurbuz are associated with business and many youths from the district work overseas.⁶



People waiting near Ghulam Khan pass



People waiting to cross Ghulam Khan pass



Trucks waiting to cross Ghulam Khan pass



Ghulam Khan pass looking into Pakistan

⁵ National Statistic and Information Authority (Afghanistan). 2020. "Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021." National Statistic and Information Authority (NSIA). <http://www.data.gov.af/>.

⁶ Hamid, Tamim, and Abdulhaq Omeri. 2019. "Meet The Youngest District Governor In Eastern Afghanistan." Tolo News, April 1, 2019. <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/meet-youngest-district-governor-khost>.



TANAI DISTRICT, KHOST – NO OFFICIAL BORDER PASS

Tanai district is the site of a downstream marketplace near the border, with no official border crossing and a barbed wire fence built along the border. Home to a population of 67,360 of primarily Pashtuns, Tanai is a rural, underdeveloped district with limited infrastructure. The district borders Gurbuz district to the east and Pakistan to the south. Tanai is home to the Pashtun Tanai tribe who have had a prolonged dispute with Pakistan concerning the area of the forest located in the mountains between their tribe in Afghanistan and those living on the other side of the border.⁷ Given the insecurity in the district, it was not possible for local researchers to take photos of the border crossing.



⁷ "Tanai Tribe." 2011. Afghanistan Biographies. http://www.afghan-bios.info/index.php?option=com_afghanbios&id=1774&task=view&total=3674&start=3278&Itemid=2.

World Bank. 2018. "Afghanistan: Improved Roads Connect People to Opportunities and Services in Khost Province." World Bank, January 31, 2018. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2018/01/25/afghanistan-improved-roads-connect-people-opportunities-services-khost-province>.

UnseenAfg. 2018. "Tanai district, Khost province #theunseenafghanistan." Twitter. <https://twitter.com/theunseenafg/status/1023588010376540161>.



V. BORDER CROSSING

REASONS FOR CROSSING

Due to its remote nature and harsh geography, basic resources in the border region are difficult to access. Making a living through agriculture is more difficult in the border regions than elsewhere in Afghanistan, and due to these factors as well as the security situation, the efforts of the government and its international partners to improve the resources and infrastructure of the border regions have met with little success. However, the proximity to the border and the number of people who pass through create opportunities in trade, retail, and related sectors that do not exist elsewhere in the country. Accordingly, crossing the border becomes integral to the livelihoods of locals living in the border region. Policies designed to promote or inhibit crossing into Pakistan have a direct impact on the livelihood strategies and practices of those living in the area. Responses across the selected areas suggest a downturn in border crossing in all four regions due to recent policy changes including ID requirements for crossing and construction of a barbed wire fence along the border.

The primary reasons for border crossing remain largely consistent across the four sampled research sites. While crossing occurs at varying levels in the different regions, the primary reasons identified include trade/business, medical treatment, education, and visits to relatives across the border.

Respondents in Muhmand Dara, Gurbuz, and Dand Patan increasingly indicate that people primarily cross the border to access medical treatment, work opportunities, or to visit relatives. Many people reported that the resources located on the Pakistan side of the border are of higher quality than those available on the Afghan side of the border. Accordingly, respondents report that the presence of a formal gate for crossing is critical for the economic well-being of the area.

“People in the border region travel across the border to Pakistan for different reasons including business, wage work and visiting their relatives. Some of them go there for healthcare because it is better quality and more effective.” [P6, 36, Male, Illiterate, Laborer, Pashtun, Self-employed, Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]

“Most border tribes are Pashtun. Most families live on both sides of the border, they have the same culture and traditions, and their joys and sorrow are shared.” [P51, Male, 9 years of education, student, Zazai, Dand Patan, Paktia]

“Most people know each other on both sides of the border and have business partnerships. Some people’s home is on the other side of the border while their business



is on this side of the border.” [p54, 33 years old, Male, 14 years of education, Shopkeeper, Pashtun, Dand Patan, Paktia]

In Dand Patan and Gurbuz, numerous individuals assert that people rarely cross the border to access and education since those resources have become more available to them on the Afghan side of the border.

“People don’t go for education purposes, but they go for healthcare services because we don’t have proper healthcare services here.” [P41, 35 Years Old, Male, Illiterate, Farmer, Pashtun, Self-employed, Dand-e- Patan, Paktia]

“Some people from Gurbuz tribe are living on the other side of the border and getting an education but people from this side do not cross the border for education purpose.” [P67, 66 Years Old, Male, 6 Years of Education, Community Leader, Pashtun, None, Gurbuz, Khost]

“Nowadays, we do not have need to travel to Pakistan for education and employment opportunities. Actually, there are two major factors which compel us to cross the border and go to Pakistan. Namely, local residents cross the border for healthcare or for taking agriculture products to different parts of Pakistan.” [P47, 26 years old, Male, 16 years of education, Teacher, Pashtun, Ministry of Education, Dand Patan, Paktia]

Other individuals, including a teacher indicated that there are more education opportunities in Pakistan. A teacher in Dand Patan explained that before policy changes requiring visa and passport, people would regularly travel for education to Pakistan. However, people have been crossing less for this purpose given the ID requirements and other limitations at the border.

In Tanai, residents used to cross at informal crossing points regularly for the same reasons as their border area counterparts. Now however, due to the construction of the fence and their lack of access to a formal crossing point– these communities rarely cross into Pakistan for any reason. The construction of the fence, barriers imposed by Pakistan border patrol, and costly ID requirements prevent locals in Tanai from crossing to Pakistan. In some cases, people from Tanai may cross to Pakistan for medical emergencies via Ghulam Khan gate in Gurbuz.

“Now they cannot travel, they used to travel for treatment. Businessmen can travel from anywhere they want to, but our people used to travel through this way for treatment.” [P114, 22, Male, 15 years, Shopkeeper, Pashtun, Tanai, Khost]

“Rich people in our region have crossed the border for education. Poor people are not able to cross the border for education.” [P93, 50 years old, Male, Illiterate, Laborer, Pashtun, Tanai, Khost]

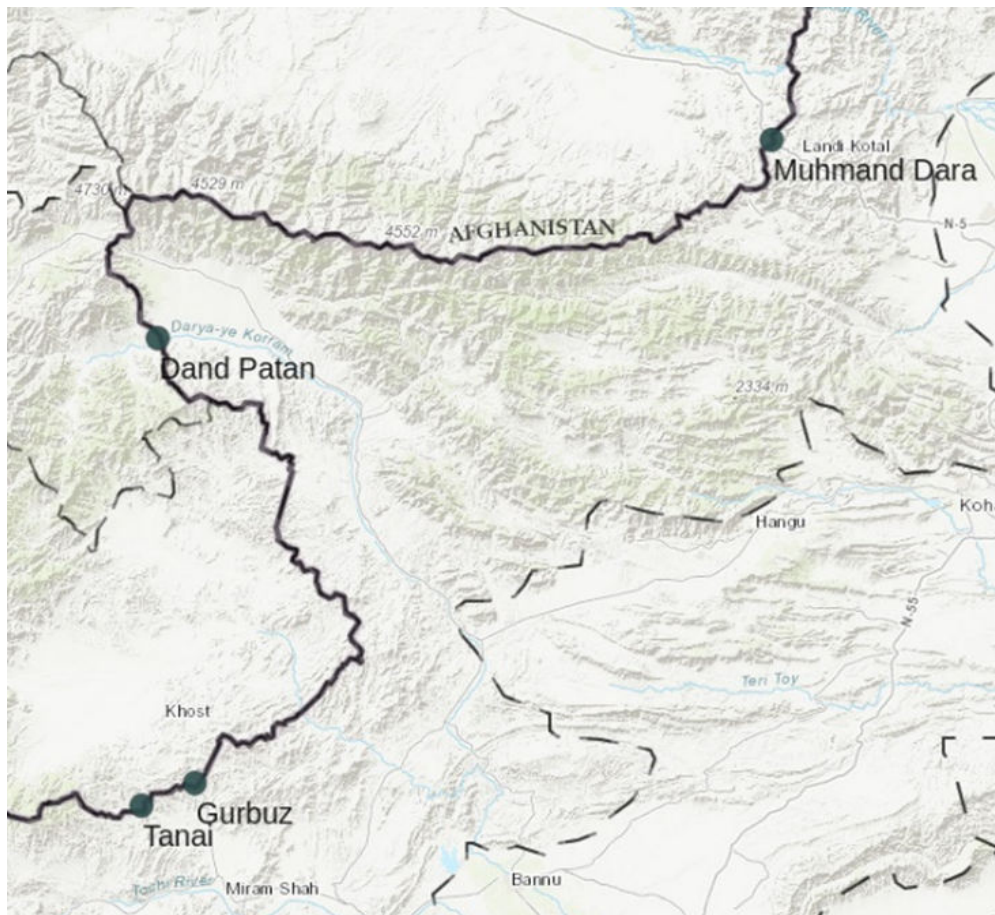


It is important to note that despite the dependence on the border that most respondents describe, many respondents do not cross the border themselves, some due to lack of interest in doing so, and others due to barriers imposed by the Pakistani authorities. These include both institutional barriers such as requirements for visas and passports, and physical barriers such as the barbed wire fence.

TRAVEL MAP OF CROSSING POINTS

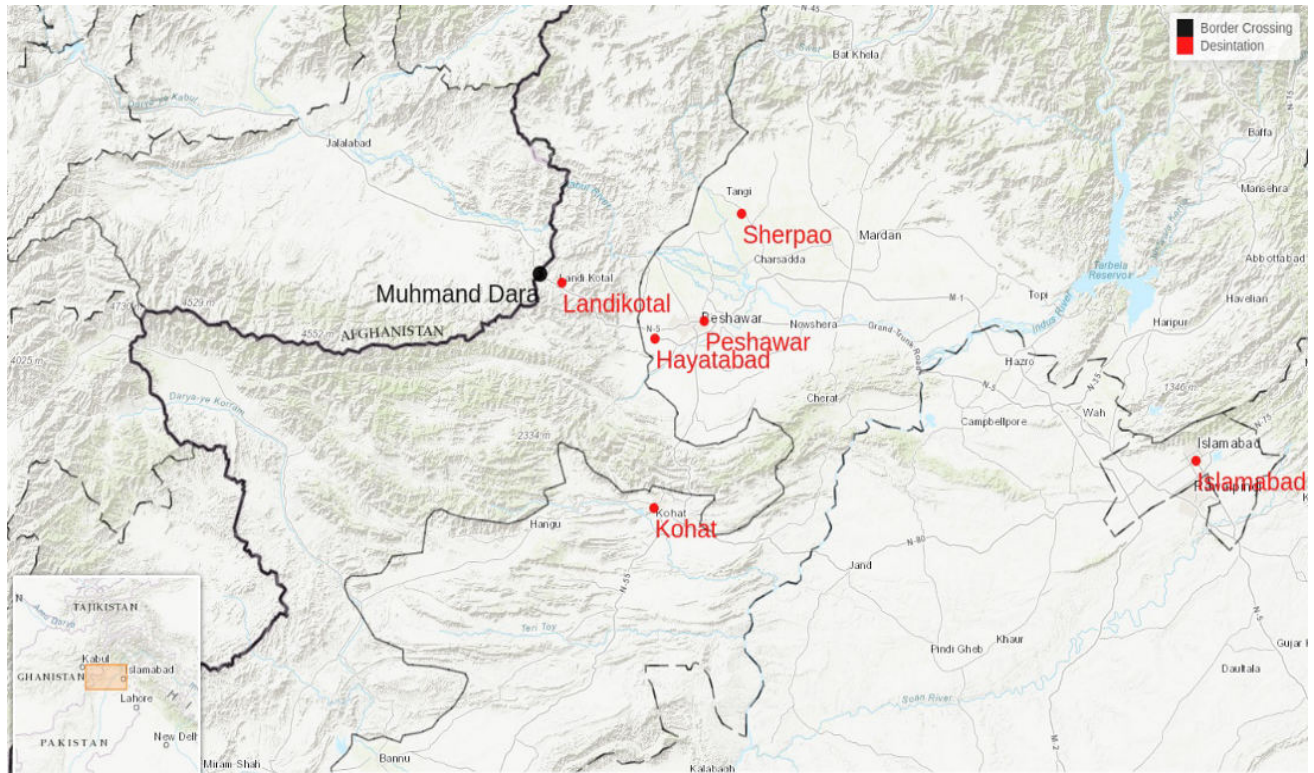
The Torkham border crossing links Jalalabad city, the capital of the eastern Nangarhar province, with Peshawar through Muhmand Dara district and the Khyber Pass. The Ghulam Khan border crossing connects Gurbuz district of the eastern Khost province to Miranshah city, the capital of North Waziristan. The maps below illustrate the crossing patterns that were commonly practiced across all four locations, including informal travel patterns in Tanai, which were used prior to the construction of the fence.

MAP A: MAP OF THE FOUR CROSSING POINTS COVERED IN THE CURRENT RESEARCH

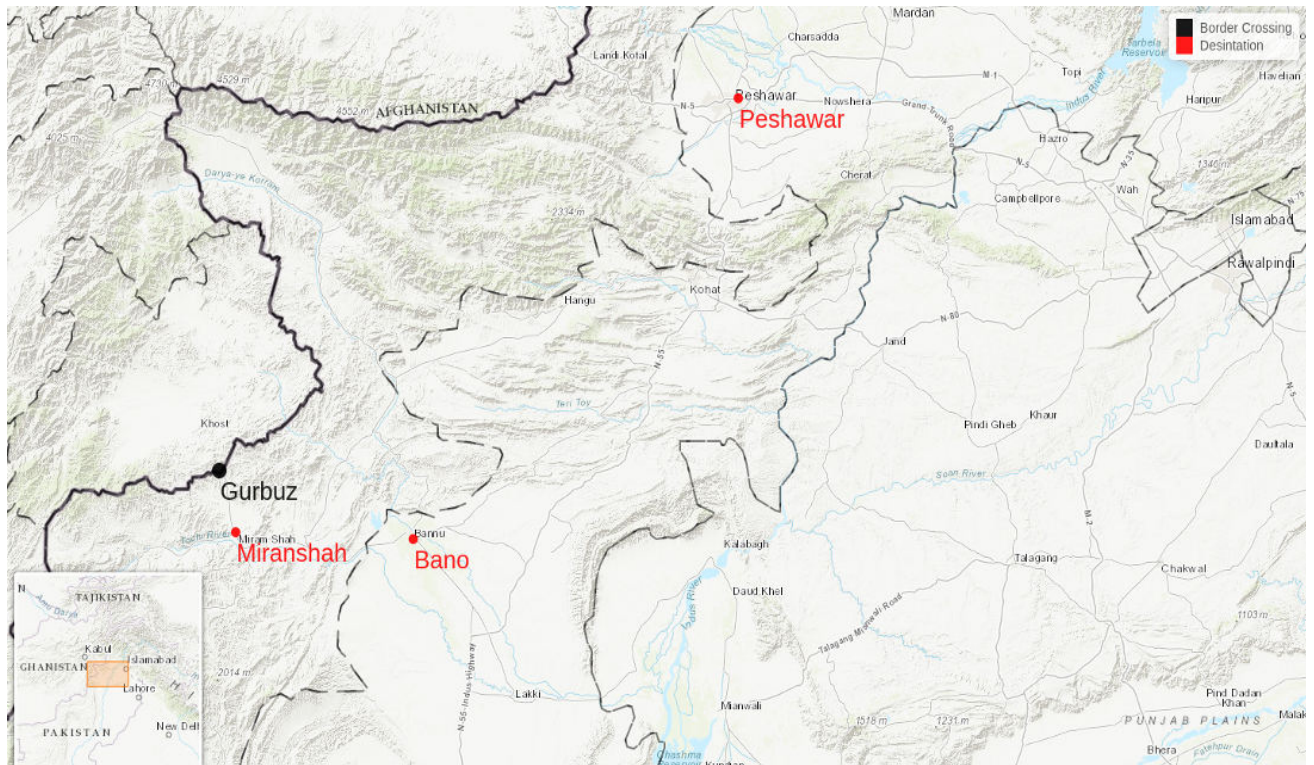




MAP B: TORKHAM GATE, MUHMAND DAR, NANGARHAR

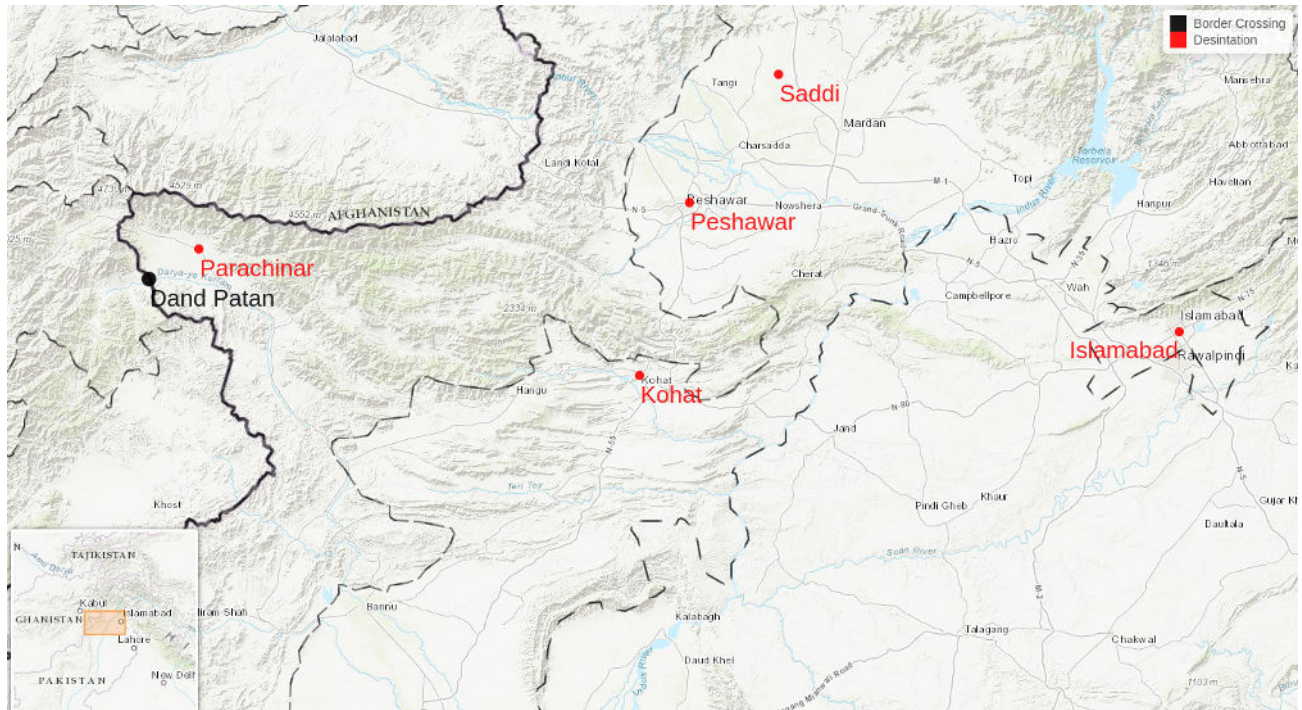


MAP C: GHULAM KHAN PASS, GURBUZ, KHOST

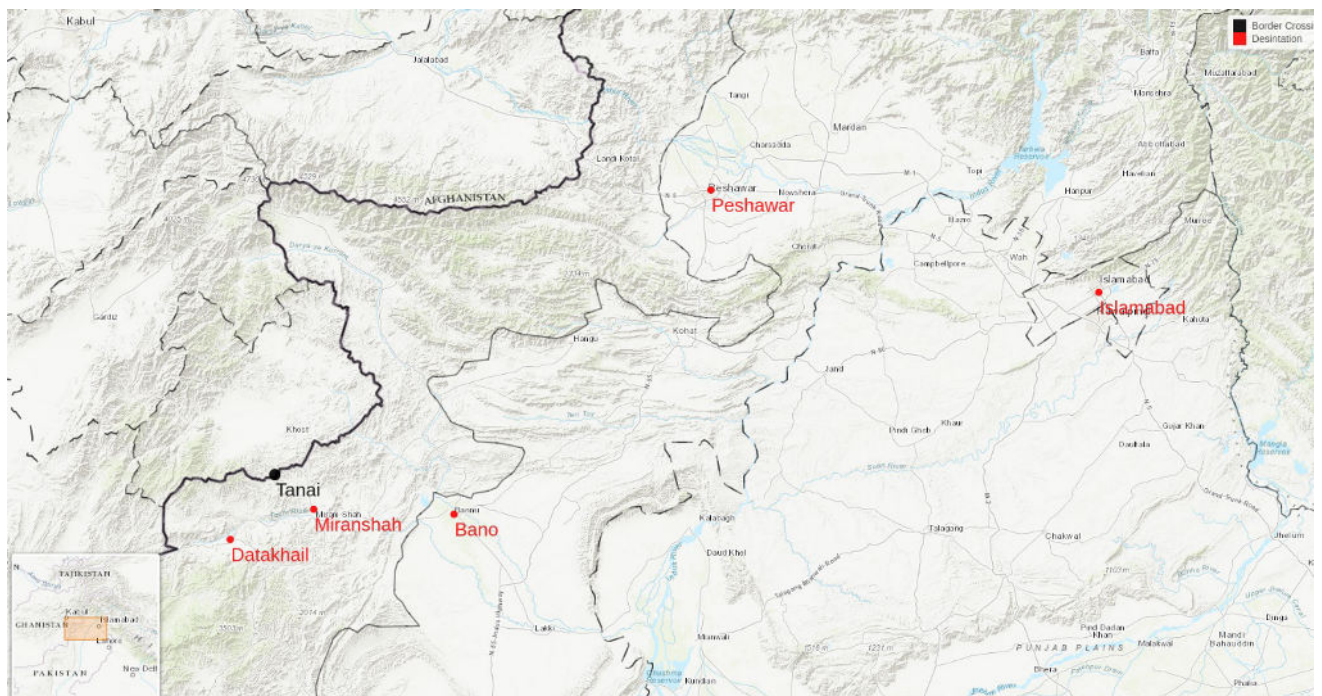




MAP D: KHARLACHI PASS, DAND PATAN, PAKTIA



MAP E: NO OFFICIAL BORDER PASS, TANAI, KHOIST





VI. IMPLEMENTATION OF BORDER POLICIES AND PRACTICES

TABLE A: DESCRIPTION AND IMPACT OF POLICIES IMPLEMENTED AT THE BORDER

Policy	Description	Impact
24/7 opening of Torkham Gate	In September 2019, Pakistan PM Imran Khan inaugurated the opening of Torkham 24/7 to ease trade and address long wait times at the gate. Many respondents have indicated that the opening has had its intended impact in Torkham, improving the traffic flow of people and vehicles at the gate and they are able to cross without excessive delays.	Locals indicated that the opening of the gate has improved business and employment and wage work opportunities by reducing delays in transporting cargo to Pakistan. The influx of travelers that have arrived in Torkham as a result of the gate opening has also improved the local economy as travelers patronize hotels and shops in the area.
Visa and Passport requirements	In June 2016, the Pakistani government implemented specific border policy requiring Afghans to have a valid visa or passport to cross into Pakistan. Later in January 2019, the Pakistani government also suspended the provision of “on arrival” visas which allowed locals to obtain visas at border crossing points. Ultimately, Afghan citizens are required to obtain a passport and then a visa from a Pakistani consulate in Jalalabad, Kabul, or Herat.	The Pakistani border patrol strictly enforces visa and passport requirements for crossing the border. This has resulted in a lengthy and costly process for border locals to secure the required passport and visa, which many border locals cannot afford. This has disrupted the livelihoods of border locals who have historically engaged in transnational movement to Pakistan to visit relatives or access basic services and employment opportunities.
Construction of border fence	Pakistan began fencing the border with barbed wire nearly 3 meters high along the Durand line citing that its construction would prevent insurgents from traveling across the border. Reports suggest that the Pakistani government had also started to deploy landmines along the Durand line and dug wide trenches to prevent informal crossing. The fence is patrolled by Pakistani forces to prevent informal crossing.	Although some participants have indicated that the construction of the fence has improved security, the prevention of informal travel has affected the social and economic aspects of life in all four of the border districts in this study. Border residents in Khost and Paktia are particularly hindered by the fence, as much of their livelihood strategies were historically dependent informal trade and crossing.



24/7 OPENING OF TORKHAM GATE

In September 2019, Pakistan PM Imran Khan inaugurated the opening of Torkham 24/7 to ease trade and address long wait times at the gate. Many respondents have indicated that the opening has had its intended impact in Torkham, improving the traffic flow of people and vehicles at the gate and they are able to cross without excessive delays.

“When the gate is open 24/7, all people having a passport and visa are able to cross it at any time without taking turns and waiting in long lines.” [P27, 51 Years Old, Male, 16 Years of Education, Customs official, Pashtun, Customs Department, Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]

“When the border is open 24/7, people and vehicles are allowed to cross the gate at any time.” [P28, 42 years old, Male, Uneducated, Truck Driver, Pashtun/Mohmand, Self-employed, Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]

“There are no problems commuting now.” [P2, 26, Female, 14 years, Employee of Immigrations affairs department, Pashtun, Ministry of Immigrations affairs, Jalalabad, Nangarhar]

Respondents indicated that the gate has also improved business by reducing delays in transporting cargo and creating more job opportunities in the area. According to P25, fellow businessmen with a visa and passport are able to import and export cargo much more easily than before – as trucks are allowed to cross the gate at any time of the day. Prior to this measure, respondents in the 2019 X Border study in Torkham reported frequent delays at the border resulting in lost business and the rotting of fresh produce and crops meant to be sold on the other side of the border. P16, a community leader in Torkham explained that now, the goods of traders are able to reach the market on time, thanks to the 24/7 opening of the gate. He explained that residents of the border region are very happy with this recent policy change since their economic well-being is completely dependent on the business operations and travel that occur at the border.

“Previously, when the gate was open for 12 hours a day, we had to wait for 26 days when the gate was opened. Following the 24/7 opening of the gate, we only have to wait for two days. The initiative also resulted in the reduction of people traffic. Moreover, a lot of problems have become resolved with this.” [P30, 34 years old, Male, Uneducated, Truck Driver, Pashtun (Mohmand), Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]

Respondents agree that the influx in trade has led to an increase in daily wage work and other job opportunities for locals in the area. While not all wage workers may have the documentation to



cross into Pakistan, the gate opening creates opportunities for work on the Afghan side of the border. Overall, these improvements to the local economy indicate overall improvements in living conditions for borderland communities in Torkham.

UNINTENDED IMPACTS OF TORKHAM GATE OPENING

The 24/7 opening has also attracted an influx of travelers from across Afghanistan seeking to cross the border at that gate. Accordingly, numerous respondents indicated that while the flow of traffic has improved, there are larger crowds as anyone with a passport and visa from Afghanistan can cross the gate at any time. Despite the increased crowds and travel through the area, the majority acknowledge that the 24/7 opening of Torkham gate has had no negative impact on the security situation in Muhmand Dara. Many respondents think that the security situation of the area has actually improved because of the gate opening.

Many locals, particularly wage laborers and local shopkeepers welcome the influx of travelers arriving at the border, as it contributes to the improvement of their personal economic conditions and the local economy overall. Accordingly, the opening of the gate has different levels of impact on the individuals living near the border. While all people in the region were affected by the opening, businessmen, traders and laborers are the groups most influenced. According to P3, a wage laborer living in Muhmand Dara, the gate opening has given laborers and other local residents increased access to employment opportunities. Accounts suggest that due to the opening of the gate, people are able to travel more often and businessmen are able to import and export their cargo on a more consistent basis, leading to an increase in opportunities for wage work.

Like many other respondents from the area, P22, a student living in Muhmand Dara revealed that shops and hotels are now operating 24/7 to meet the needs of individuals crossing the border at all times. This increase in regular business operations has improved the economy and led to more stable incomes and livelihood strategies for locals in the area. Medical patients have also been positively impacted by the opening, while many medical patients were adversely impacted by the long wait times at the border before, respondents suggest that those with a visa and passport are able to cross much more easily when needed. These emergency patients, both young and old, travel to Pakistan to treat severe and chronic medical conditions such as kidney disease, heart disease or cancer. However, only those with money can formally travel to Pakistan for healthcare.

Some youth travelling to Pakistan for affordable education have benefited as well. Young children of middle-income families often attend Madrasas in Pakistan. Young adults with proper ID also attended higher educational institutes in Pakistan to earn professional degrees, such as a bachelor's or master's degree in medicine.

It is worth noting that despite the improvements to the local economy, in terms of physical access to Pakistan, the opening of the gate is only beneficial for individuals with a Visa and Passport. Benefits to those who cannot get a passport or visa at most accrue only indirectly in the form of better employment opportunities from increased cross-border trade. Otherwise, some individuals



may be able to cross by paying a bribe to Pakistani officials to cross. Both of these pre-requisites for crossing are costly, which explains why many locals in Torkham no longer cross the border to Pakistan. Among the thirty respondents surveyed in Torkham, 19/30 indicated that they had crossed the border in the past six months.

Accordingly, while traffic has improved, many respondents hold that the increase in access is not necessarily a time-saver. Although there is less traffic at the gate, visa and passport requirements makes the process for crossing into Pakistan long and difficult for many. While they no longer have to wait in traffic at the gate, respondents say that the process for obtaining a visa and passport has not changed. Accordingly, there are long lines at the consulate in Kabul and Torkham, and it can take locals up to 10 days to request a passport and visa.



P9, Tribal Leader
Muhmand Dara, Nangarhar

“I crossed the gate with a lot of difficulties because I had to take turns and wait in a long line to get my passport and visa stamped by Pakistani border officials who usually mistreat and humiliate Afghans on their territory.”

“No people were standing in front of the consulate in Kabul and Torkham for 10 days. They waited to get the visa, also in Torkham the process for obtaining the visa is not processed soon and there aren’t any positive changes.” [P114, 22, Male, 15 years, Shopkeeper, Pashtun, Tanai, Khost]

Respondents disagree on the impact that the policy changes have had on informal travel: some say that the changes have reduced informal travel across the border, while others assert that the 24/7 opening has not affected informal travel and that illegal crossing may have even increased as people can still pay bribes to border officials to cross. Locals also noted that the frequency of informal travel depends on the border being open, people in Torkham attempt to cross illegally when it is closed.

“Informal trade is going on to some extent because bribery is common at the border. Informal traders can pay bribe and do their business.” [P10, 20 years old, Male, Illiterate, Farmer, Pashtun (Mohmand), Self-employed, Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]

In general, most of the respondents in Khost and Paktia are not aware of the 24/7 opening of Torkham. It stands to reason that this has so far had little direct impact of the lives of people in



other border communities located further away from Torkham, though in the longer term, if considerable trade gets diverted to Torkham, it could. However, the construction of the fence on the Pakistan side of the border is seen as having a larger (and negative) impact. Those aware of Torkham gate and its impact on the local economy have requested that the government establish formal gates in their areas so that similar benefits can be fulfilled in their border districts.

ADMINISTRATIVE RESTRICTIONS TO CROSSING

IDENTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS (POLICY)

Over the last few years, the Pakistani government has sought to strengthen its control of the border, tightening restrictions for crossing following a series of security incidents near the border. After the TTP attacked a school in Peshawar in 2014, the Pakistani government slowly tightened security measures. Two years later, in June 2016, the Pakistani government introduced specific border policy requiring Afghans to have a valid visa or passport to cross.⁸ In January 2019, visa regulations were further strengthened as Immigration authorities of Pakistan stopped the issuance of “on arrival” visas at border crossings to Afghan citizens. Prior to this cancellation of the on-arrival visa facility, Afghans were more easily able to secure the visa required by the government – being issued 30-day visas at Pakistani entry points. Currently however, Afghans are required to apply for a visa at a Pakistani consulate or Pakistani diplomatic missions before traveling to the country. According to a Voice of America interview with Ismatullah Junejo, the director of the Immigration Wing at the Federal Investigation agency in addition to stricter visa requirements, Afghan visitors to Pakistan would be required to fill out special registration forms to provide details visit which would then be shared with relevant police stations for further verification.⁹

In the past, Afghan and Pakistani governments were cooperative and people could cross the border with only a Tazkira (Afghan National ID), Pakistani ID or even without any documents. Now, few people from the border region can cross to Pakistan given the ID requirements. Respondents in our study mentioned that they also avoid crossing due to the misbehaviors, including bribery and violence, of Pakistan officials at the border. Prior to the implementation of these policies, a 2017 study found that over 20,000 people would cross the border to Pakistan per day in Torkham. The implementation of ID requirements found that this figure was decreased to 2,000 to 2,500 per day.¹⁰

⁸ "Assessment of Incoming Afghan Nationals (Torkham Border)." June 2017.

[https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/situation_reports/file/IOMPakistan_0617_AssessmentofIncomingAfghanNationals\(Torkham Border\).pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/situation_reports/file/IOMPakistan_0617_AssessmentofIncomingAfghanNationals(Torkham Border).pdf).

⁹ Gul, Ayaz. 2020. "Pakistan Stops Issuing 'On Arrival' Visas for Afghans." Voice of America, January 3, 2020. <https://www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/pakistan-stops-issuing-arrival-visas-afghans>.

¹⁰ *ibid*



TABLE B: COSTS AND PROCEDURE OF VISA AND PASSPORT REQUIREMENTS

Impact of Visa and Passport requirements	
Passport cost	~6,000 – 10,000 AFN (\$78 – 130 USD)
Visa cost	~ 19,225– 23,070 AFN (\$200 – 300 USD)
Process	A Tazkira is required to secure an Afghan passport. Tazkira holders apply for a passport at the provincial center, most often at the Police Headquarters in their area. Reports suggest that it takes roughly one month to receive an Afghan passport. Once a passport is secured, the individual must travel to Kabul or Jalalabad to apply for a visa which respondents frequently indicate that it can take up to 2 to 3 months to receive. Wealthier individuals are able to pay more to get the process expedited.
Total average cost of travel (reports vary by research site)	<p>Muhmand Dara, Nangarhar: 5,000 – 15,000 AFN for many respondents in the district; others have reported 20,000 – 30,000 AFN</p> <p>Gurbuz and Tanai, Khost: 60,000 – 70,000 AFN to cross through Torkham; 10,000 to 30,000 AFN to cross through Ghulam Khan</p> <p>Dand Patan, Paktia: 20,000-30,000 AFN; 60,000 – 70,000 AFN for emergency travel</p>

Study participants assert the visa and passport requirements are strict with very limited exceptions making it very difficult for ordinary border locals to cross. As a result of these requirements, Afghans must travel to one of the three Pakistani consulates in Afghanistan to secure a visa (Kabul, Kandahar, and Jalalabad). The process of obtaining a visa often results in long travel delays as Afghans await their passport and visa for crossing. Respondents describe that it is expensive and difficult process to obtain these documents, in which they must apply for an Afghan passport and then apply for a visa from the Pakistani consulate. Respondents report that a visa can take weeks or months to arrive unless a bribe is paid.

“Anyone that applies for a passport must pay 6000 AFN to the government. Besides that, \$200 or \$300 is paid to get visa. This payment is given to the commissioner. In addition to that, sometimes we pay 10,000Rs or 15,000Rs to a Pakistani smuggler to take us to Pakistan. Some amount of money is also required for daily expenses for travel” [P35, 25 years old, Male, 16 years of education, Wage laborer, Self-employed, Dand-Patan, Paktia]

“Everyone has Tazkira, but it requires 60,000 AFN 70,000 AFN to get a passport and visa and travel, meanwhile we are not able to earn 60 AFN or 70 AFN a week. Due to lack of money we are not able to take our patients to doctors. Most of them die at home



without receiving medical treatment.” [P120, 35 Years Old, Male, Illiterate, Truck Driver, Pashtun, Self-Employed, Tanai, Khost]

Respondents in Gurbuz report that anyone, including medical patients and businessmen, must also provide a Pakistani ID for crossing. Respondents assert that this requirement makes crossing difficult as there is no process for obtaining a Pakistani ID in Afghan border areas. Furthermore, additional travel expenses like transportation, lodging, food add ~30,000-60,000 AFN to total expenses, which many border residents cannot afford. Medical patients also cannot cross in a timely manner due to the lengthy documentation process. Moreover, crossing the border becomes a limited option for only those wealthier individuals who are able to obtain these the legal documents necessary for crossing.

Responses from participants make it evident that the process for securing a passport and visa is lengthy and difficult, the high costs and wait times have harbored frustration among Afghans who have historically crossed to Pakistan to meet their basic needs. Respondents have explained that the long waits and high costs have left people in desperate situations since many participants are unable to afford the high costs of the ID requirements nor the cost of travel to Jalalabad or Kabul necessary to obtain a visa. Further, respondents felt that both the Pakistani and Afghan governments do not have the capacity to take grant the volume of visas and passports required for passing to Pakistan in a timely manner.

“It is very difficult to get a passport because it requires a lot of waiting, hardship and effort. After receiving a passport, we have to turn to the Pakistan Consulate for a visa which also requires a lot of time, energy and effort to be obtained.” [P25, 39 years old, Male, Illiterate, Businessman, Pashtun, Own business, Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]

Most of the people here do not have ID cards, first they make an ID card, then they will go to the city for a few days to confirm the ID card, after that 10 or 20 days will be spend by making passport. Then they will go to Kabul or Nangarhar to get visa, getting visa will also take 10 Or 20 days, if you pay ten thousand Afghani, you will get visa quickly and if you do not pay then you will have to wait in line, maybe some sick people will die because of wasting a lot of time in getting visa, because many patients have died there, so totally 40 or 50 thousand Afghani will be spent. [P105, 36 years old, Male, Illiterate, Local Shura Member, Pashtun, Tanai, Khost]

Recently, after a seven month pause of granting Visas to Afghans due the coronavirus, the Pakistani consulate re-opened to grant Afghans visas for crossing on October 21, 2020. In an effort to avoid gathering a large crowd at the consulate, thousands of Afghans from Nangarhar and other provinces were directed to a sports stadium in Jalalabad city to receive tokens required for visa



application. News reports indicate that the crowd was very large and when the gates opened a stampede ensued leading to the deaths of 15 people, consisting of 11 women and several elderly people. These recent events are indicative of the desperation expressed by many locals in this study describing their experience securing a visa. In response to the tragedy, Pakistan President, Imran Khan, released a statement indicating that Pakistani authorities are “engaged with Afghan authorities for better facilitation of visa applicants.”¹¹



EXCEPTIONS TO ID REQUIREMENTS

Participants describe that in some cases at Ghulam Khan pass, individuals with medical emergencies are allowed to cross if they are guaranteed by their relatives in Pakistan. In these cases, the medical patient gives their name, their father’s name and their Tazkira ID number in order to receive special border passes that allow them to cross the border and receive medical treatment in Pakistan. All patients that cross border with special “tokens” are formally registered

¹¹ Al Jazeera. 2020. “Many dead in stampede near Pakistan consulate in Afghanistan.” Al Jazeera News, October 21, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/21/many-dead-in-stampede-near-pakistan-consulate-in-afghanistan>.

Sultan, Ahmad. 2020. “Afghans jostling for visas to Pakistan spark stampede, killing 15.” Reuters, October 21, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-pakistan-stampede/afghans-jostling-for-visas-to-pakistan-spark-stampede-killing-15-idUSKBN2760J0>.



at the Parachinar Hospital in Pakistan. Respondents assert that these exceptions are typically only made for female patients, particularly elderly women. For instance, if an elderly woman is critically ill Pakistani authorities may allow that individual to cross with a special token if they have Pakistani relatives who are willing to vouch for them at the border.

“Due to the barbed wire fence and deployment of Pakistani troops along the Durand Line no one is able to cross it illegally. However, severely sick women guaranteed by their relatives in Pakistan could be given permission to cross the border and travel to the said country for medical treatment without passport and visa.” [P4, Male, 57, Pashtun, 8 Years, Member Of Community Council, Dand Patan]

Some respondents however asserted that this system of using special passes for medical patients is often futile because it takes an extensive amount of time to cross using this method of vouching and not many people have relatives with a Pakistani citizenship on that side of the border.

CONSTRUCTION OF BORDER FENCE (POLICY)

In mid-2017, Pakistan began fencing the border with barbed wire nearly 3 meters high along the Durand line citing that its construction would prevent insurgents from traveling across the border. Reports suggest that the Pakistani government had also started to deploy landmines along the Durand line and dug wide trenches to prevent informal crossing.¹²

For centuries, Pashtuns living on either side of the border participated in regular, informal movement between present day Pakistan and Afghanistan with families living on either side of the border. Now however, informal travel is prevented by Pakistani troops and the barbed wire fence along the border. Individuals who have a relative or guarantor in Pakistan and members of the Taliban are occasionally permitted by Pakistan soldiers to cross the border through informal crossing points. However, informal gates are mainly closed to the public. Travel for any reason, including as business, trade, or healthcare, is strictly monitored. Although, smugglers sometimes manage to informally enter Pakistan, they are subject to punishment by Pakistan border police and deportation. Many locals in the study reported that Pakistani officials mistreat Afghans at the border, making formal and informal travel to Pakistan less common.

Afghans view the Durand Line as an informal boundary separating Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, Pakistan aims to consider the Durand Line as a formal international border. One respondent in the Muhmand Dara FGD shared that an Afghan doctor was killed for failing to recognize the Durand line as formal border and informally crossing. Afghans attempt to stay away

¹² "Afghan Border Fencing to Be Completed by 2020, Pakistan Says." Voice of America. November 5, 2019. <https://www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/afghan-border-fencing-be-completed-2020-pakistan-says>.



from the Durand line and other informal gates to avoid punishment by Pakistan troops. However, the same respondent also cautions that many Afghans must travel to Pakistan to meet their basic needs. Respondents believe that the Afghan government wishes to remove the barbed wire and Pakistani soldiers, but it is too weak to do so.

“Like other Afghanistan citizens, locals also do not recognize the Durand Line as the international border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The line was imposed on Afghans, and none of Afghanistan's governments recognized it as a formal frontier between the two countries. Dr. Najib was killed because he refused to recognize the said line as the international boundary between Afghanistan and Pakistan. If Kings and Presidents do not recognize it, how can we expect ordinary people and subjects to accept it?” [P3, Male, 55 Years Old, Pashtun/Mohmand, 12 Years, Mullah]



P119, Truck driver
Tanai, Khost

“There was demarcation line between people living on both sides of the border, but now Pakistan army invaded our territory and captured more than half of our region. It has affected our social life. Due to barbed wire along the Durand line, we are not able to visit our relatives living on that side of the border.”

MUHMAND DARA, NANGARHAR

Prior to the construction of the fence, Afghans in Muhmand Dara would regularly travel using informal routes, such as Goroko, Sasobi, Salaman and Kanchal, to Pakistan. Respondents explain that now, only smugglers and drug traffickers can sometimes manage to reach Pakistan through Goroko. All other informal routes are closed to the public. Informal gates were closed by the installation of the barbed wire fence along the Durand Line. Respondents emphasized that the barbed wire fence is the main preventative measure taken by Pakistan that restricts informal travel in the area. Now, anyone crossing the border in the area must produce a passport and visa and travel using the formal gate. However, many accounts suggest that even when using the formal gate, they are often expected to pay a bribe to Pakistani border patrol.

“In the past, people were crossing the border with ease and with no official documents such as passport and visa. Going to Pakistan was like going to the other provinces inside Afghanistan. But now it has completely changed. No one can cross the border without a passport and visa or without paying a bribe.” [F1, Female, 45 Years Old, Pashtun, 14 Years, Teacher]



Respondents ensured that the construction of the fence has made it virtually impossible for anyone to illegally cross the border. The barbed wire blocks all informal routes previously used in the area. Locals are keenly aware that if anyone attempts to cross without documentation through informal ways, they are punished even killed by the Pakistan army and Pakistan border police. Individuals in the area who have attempted to informally cross the border have been captured, beaten, or shot by Pakistan troops along the border.

“Due to the barbed wire fence along the border no one can cross the boundary into Pakistan. Anyone who attempts to cross the frontier illegally will be shot to dead by Pakistani troops deployed along it.” [F1, FGD1, Male, 35 years old, Pashtun/Mohmand, 16 years, Teacher]

“Crossing the border through informal ways is illegal, and a person who does so is actually playing with their lives. If they are captured by the Pakistani police, they will be badly beaten and tortured. The only way to survive the police torture is to pay bribes. So beating and torturing people in the border is hard for people to experience while crossing the border.” [F1, FGD2, Female, 45 Years Old, Pashtun, 14 Years, Teacher]

Despite the restrictions, respondents asserted that the ability to cross the border informally is critical for lower-income families in the area who often must informally travel to Pakistan for healthcare, business, and education. Respondents emphasized the importance of crossing, explaining that informal travel was used to transport emergency patients to seek serious medical treatment. Youth in the area would also cross informally to Pakistan earn an income and provide for their family. Locals felt that the capacity to cross informally is often necessary in emergency cases due to the difficult documentation process. Many respondents pleaded that people are often unable to get a passport or visa within several weeks or months, so they must use informal routes. Regardless of their explanations however, all informal ways are blocked by the barbed wire fence. Now in Muhmand Dara, only those willing to pay very large bribes to Pakistan officials might manage to cross without proper documentation.

GURBUZ, KHOST

In Gurbuz, the lack of resource access is the primary issue in the area. Before the construction of the fence, the Durand Line had not felt like a real border because people could still cross easily, but now that the fence has been built and restrictions have been tightened, the border's presence and impact on their lives is much more palpable. The participants perceive the fence and border closures as having had a severe impact on their community, COVID-19 only a minor one.

Gurbuz tribe members and Pashtun families are currently separated due to border closures and the barbed wire fence. P68, a community leader in Gurbuz explained that members of families live on the Afghan side while the other members of families live on the Pakistan side of the border. Although these relatives used to participate in regular back and forth movement to meet, they are



now unable to see their family members – respondents explained “we cannot even participate in their funeral ceremonies.

“Social life is destroyed due to barbed wire on the borderline. Half of the Gurbuz tribe is left on the other side of the border and half on this side of the border.” [P86, 57 Years Old, Male, 5 Years of Education, Trader, Pashtun, Gurbuz, Khost]

The fence is of particular concerns to residents in Gurbuz since the Ghulam Khan port is not always open. Given that Ghulam Khan gate is a secondary pass, it does not operate as consistently as more established gates like in Torkham or Spin Boldak. Accordingly, when Ghulam Khan gate is closed, some people including traders and businessmen, must cross the border at other gates, such as the Torkham port, which are very far away and more expensive.

“We used to be able to trade through our nearest border but now this border is closed, and we must travel long distances to trade at other ports.” [P82, 32 years old, Female, 16 years of education, Student, Pashtun, Gurbuz, Khost]

“It requires 10,000 AFN to cross the border to Pakistan through Ghulam Khan, but in total, 60,000 AFN is necessary to travel through Torkham.” [P87, 36 Years Old, Male, 16 Years of Education, Customs official, Pashtun, Gurbuz, Khost]

Although the social, familial lives of people in Gurbuz have been critically impacted by the fence, many residents agree that war and anti-government attacks have decreased. Monitoring of the fence and other restrictions to crossing has improved the security situation making it harder for insurgents to cross into the country, a local customs official claims, “insurgents cannot cross the border.”

Despite improved security, people in Gurbuz describe that the fence has led to poor economic conditions in the area. Residents explain that border crossing promoted trade and jobs in the area and that its regular operation is critical to secure the lives of people living at the border. Gurbuz is far from Khost city, so it is difficult for them to receive the goods and services that they require from anywhere other than Pakistan. Accordingly, respondents in Gurbuz name the border fence as the primary restriction to crossing. Respondents warn that crossing informally is very dangerous, similar to Muhmand Dara, individuals who have tried crossing informally are often shot by Pakistan border patrols.

“The barbed wire fences have blocked all the crossing areas. In the past, people could use big trucks to cross the borders, but they now cannot. People used to cross the border by



having their Tazkira and could stay over on that side for at least 15 days.” [P84, 30 years old, Male, 4 years of education, shopkeeper, Pashtun, Gurbuz, Khost]

DAND PATAN, PAKTIA

Due to their challenges with resource access, participants reify the disdain for the barbed wire fence constructed along the Durand line. Similar to their borderland counterparts in Gurbuz and Muhmand Dara, residents in Dand Patan report that social situations have changed and that the barbed wire has separated border tribes and families. Individuals describe that all informal travel is stopped and that the fence and Pakistani border patrol prevents them from visiting their family. Only those with proper documentation cross into Pakistan. These restrictions are often described with contempt as locals explain that their families have become divided due to the fence.

“Due to the barbed wire fence along the frontier, no one can cross [the border] in our area for any purposes, including visiting relatives living on the other side of the boundary. It has caused us many problems.” [P45, 60 years old, Male, Educated 10 years, Community Council Member, Pashtun, MMRD, Dand Patan, Paktia]

Although travel to Pakistan for education was common in the past, teachers in Dand Patan denote that there is reduced crossing for this purpose into Pakistan – most Afghans living in the border area do not travel to Pakistan for education anymore. People who can afford it now travel to Khost or Kabul to receive in education rather than to Pakistan due to the restrictions imposed at the border. Respondents suggest that the lack of travel to Pakistan for education persists despite the lack of schools, teachers, books and other educational infrastructure in the border region.

Furthermore, both respondents in in-depth interviews and the focus group discussions expressed their frustrations with the barbed wire fence and cite its construction as the catalyst for much of the economic problems in the region. Typically, the negative effects of border closure on local businessmen and workers near the border was circumvented via informal border crossing. This alternative option to maintain business and trade is no longer viable for people in Dand Patan.

TANAI, KHOST

Data suggests that the construction of the border fence has had the most detrimental impact in Tanai, Khost. Given its remote nature and substantial resource scarcity, the majority of employment opportunities in Tanai were exclusively dependent on the informal border crossing.

Many respondents in Tanai have lived at the border for generations and unanimously indicate that their lives were much better until the fence was built. P120, a truck driver living in Tanai explained that locals in Tanai would work in the mines and sell timber on the Pakistan side of the border. Before the fence, their business was good with many drivers having access to trucks and job opportunities, but since the fence was constructed all of their past work “stopped completely.”



P98, Tribal Elder
Tanai, Khost

“In the past, when there was not barbed wire and outposts of Pakistani troops along the border, people living in the area used to travel to that side of the border, namely the Wanna Area for business and wage work, from where they would transport required household goods and food items for consumption as well as for sale. For instance, some wealthy businessmen used to import goods and articles from that side of the border by their private vehicles in which they would take them from house to house for selling. Poor families in the area were able to purchase basic household goods and food items on credit.”

Unlike the other border areas, Tanai does not have a formal gate located in the area which exacerbates the impact of crossing restrictions on locals. Respondents report that it is nearly impossible to cross the border into Pakistan, the heavily guarded fence deters any informal crossing from taking place in this Khost province. If necessary, respondents who live in this region travel to Ghulam Khan pass in Gurbuz to cross the border into Pakistan. However, the respondents caveat substitute this explaining that the high costs of travel out of Tanai and crossing formally has left many with little resources or livelihood options. Similar to other border areas, the fence has also had a big impact on the social lives of people in Tanai. P108, a teacher in Tanai noted that many have not visited their family living on the other side of the fence since its construction. This is an issue of concern for locals at the border since many Pashtun tribes marry across the border, ultimately preventing women who marry into other families on the other side of the border from seeing their families. Some mentioned being unable to attend weddings, funerals or other important events of close family members on the Pakistan side of the border.

Unlike other areas, many in Tanai believe that the security situation has actually worsened due to the construction of the fence. They concede that more attacks have taken place at checkpoints and that the Pakistani officials have killed local residents in Tanai who have come too close to the fence. The local Afghan Police in Tanai have clashed with Pakistani authorities at the border in response to their presence and the construction of the fence. Many respondents asserted that they will never accept the installation of the fence and its infringement on their livelihoods.



P105, Local Shura Member
Tanai, Khost

“Life is not good here, when the Pakistani army came and installed barbed wire fence almost a year ago, our people were opposed to them, then we informed the Afghan government security organizations regarding the installation of the barbed wire by Pakistani army, we didn't allow them to install it, because this is our own area, we've been living here for centuries, we have been using the mountains and the pastures. Together with the Afghan Local Police, we started attacks against the Pakistani army, but our own government has told us to keep calm and wherever they install the barbed wire, let them to install it, this line is correct, both government has accepted this, but we still do not accept it, we will not accept it tomorrow, and even we will not accepted it hundred years from now.”

BRIBERY AND MISTREATMENT AT THE BORDER (PRACTICE)

In addition to restrictions on informal travel, bribery also plays a serious role in the experiences of individuals crossing the border. Individuals who apply for a passport and visa often pay a bribe to Afghan governments and the Pakistan consulate. Those who pay a bribe large enough can obtain their passport and within a week, whereas those who cannot afford to pay a bribe must wait several weeks or months for documentation. Respondents declared that the Afghan and Pakistan governments are involved in corruption. Officials on both side of the border accept bribes from people crossing the border. Bribes can be accepted from individuals with or without documentation. While this has become uncommon, in the past, those without documentation across the border areas could effectively bribe officials with large amounts of money to cross the border. Currently, it is more difficult for anyone without documents to cross, bribery by those without documentation occurs less frequently than before. In Muhmand Dara, individuals with documents typically pay a bribe between ~10,000-60,000 rupees. Medical patients, including elderly, young, and female patients generally must pay a bribe to cross for emergency medical treatment.

Focus group participants in Dand Patan asserted that almost no one in the area is able to cross the border without paying a bribe to border officials – with or without proper documentation. Respondents described abuse and mistreatment by Pakistani police, militia, and army at the gate demanding that they pay a bribe. However, they explained that this mistreatment only happens to ordinary Afghans, those who have connections with the army or other officials are treated amicably, including insurgents and wealthy individuals.

Accordingly, people's willingness to cross the border has diminished. People are unwilling to cross for recreational purposes out of fear of mistreatment and abuse. Respondents explain that people in the area only cross if they are compelled for medical or familial reasons that can only be addressed in Pakistan. Large-scale businessmen are often compelled to cross more frequently than the general public and pay bribes to maintain their business and trade. Bribes paired with



the time and money required to obtain ID documents make crossing an unwelcoming option for Afghans and reduced their willingness to cross. Poverty-stricken individuals especially avoid attempting to cross the border because of the high costs of documentation and bribery. These individuals cannot afford to pay a bribe to Pakistan officials and are afraid of being mistreated at the border.

Ultimately, these experiences prompt a narrative of mistrust and disdain for Pakistan, some explaining that the country is “not a good neighbor” and “does not keep their promises to the people.”

“I agree with my colleagues that people’s willingness to cross the border has decreased a great deal. However, prior to the barbed wire fence and deployment of Pakistani troops along the frontier local residents used travel to that side of the border region where they would participate in wedding parties and funeral ceremonies of their relatives and friends. We are Afghans who do not want their women to mistreated in Pakistan by its police, militia and army because this is dishonor and disgrace.” [FGD3, F7, Male, 33, Pashtun, 17 Years, Doctor, Dand Patan]

PROVINCIAL LEVEL POLICIES TO PROMOTE AFGHANI (POLICY)

Given its nature as a border town and the Taliban opposition to the use of Afghani, many locals in the area use Pakistani rupees as currency near the border. The implementation of this policy and associated impacts were primarily reported by respondents from Tanai. The poor economic conditions in Tanai have been exacerbated due to the ineffective implementation of policies banning the use of Pakistani currency in the area.

Respondents frequently cited that the poor economic conditions in the area have resulted from the fence and outbreak of the coronavirus. However, a number of respondents emphasize that these effects are exacerbated by the change in currency because the Afghan government is unable to control the prices of goods in the area. P114, a shopkeeper in Tanai explained that, for example, anything that was sold for 10 Pakistani rupees is equivalent to 5 Afghanis, but these goods are being sold for 10 Afghanis in local shops in the area. This currency exchange paired with the diminishing trade has contributed to the rising prices in the area.

The shift in policy is described by many locals as a major endeavor that was handled poorly by the government with no effective implementation plan. Accordingly, many traders and businessmen have taken advantage of the poor transition and have been charging much higher prices to locals in the area. Given the already weak economic conditions in Tanai, respondents indicate that the lack of price control is bad for locals who have already curbed spending due the lack of employment in the area.



P115, Businessman
Tanai, Khost

“Prices of goods increased twice as much at markets. Previously, one bag of 50 kg of flour cost 1600 RS, now we pay 2000 AFN. Mistakes were made by the provincial government because they promoted using Afghani instead of Pakistani currency, which allows businessmen and traders to sell their goods at high prices and make money via illegal means. There should be a strategic plan to gradually replace Pakistani RS with Afghanis.”

VII. IMPACT OF BORDERLAND POLICIES ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Respondents cite the erection of the barbed wire fence, deployment of the Pakistani army, and strict ID requirements as the reason why people no longer cross the border to Pakistan. Replies which cite the fence as an obstacle to receiving education, healthcare, job opportunities or other services suggest that in previous times, residents may have been crossing unofficially or informally to obtain these services. This is not surprising considering the strong family and tribal ties which span the border, as well as strong linguistic and cultural similarities between the Pashtun communities on either side. Their livelihood strategies had become critically defined by their proximity to the border as they participated in a regular back and forth movement across the border. This movement facilitated a myriad of socio-economic implications including dependence of the local economy on the border along with social and business relationships fostered along the border. Moreover, these restrictions upended the centuries long customs of the area and prompted socio-economic and security related changes at the border.

Afghans across the border regions sampled do not recognize the Durand line as an official border. Across accounts, the Durand line is considered a temporary and informal boundary between Afghanistan and Pakistan. One respondent from Dand Patan explained that locals consider Pol e Attak (The Attock Bridge over the Indus River) to be the actual, rightful border between the two countries. The erection of the fence has prompted disapproval among local residents towards the Pakistani government for constructing the fence and towards Afghan government for allowing it to happen. Moreover, Afghans in the region consider the fence to be an infringement of their nation's sovereignty.

“It is worth mentioning that we are against the construction of barbed wire fence along the Durand Line because it is not a formal international border between the two countries but it an ordinary and temporary frontier. However, Pakistan has taken advantage of the current circumstances and weak government in our country and



constructed the barbed fence along the previously mentioned line, which we do not recognize at all.” [P3, Male, 55, Pashtun, 6 Years, Member Of Community Council, Dand Patan]

“Local residents do not recognize the Durand Line to be a formal and international border between Afghanistan and Pakistan but consider it as a temporary and informal frontier between the said countries. It is Afghan people who have protected the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan but not the government with whose permission Pakistan has constructed barbed wire fence on our territory.” [P2, Male, 34, Pashtun, 14 Years, Head of District Sector, Dand Patan]

In a similar fashion, border areas, especially those without official crossing points like Gurbuz, Tanai, and Dand Patan are severely impacted by the termination of informal travel across the border. Informal travel across the border was integral to these communities, especially among poorer individuals living near secondary or tertiary border passes. Many respondents in both the focus groups and in-depth interviews cite this strictly enforced ban on travel as the cause of serious economic downturn and lacking access to basic resources in the region. Further, many in Tanai, for example, often feel they are on their own without support from the Afghan government. Community leaders in these communities have led protests against the erection of the fence due to its adverse effects on their livelihood strategies. These protests have seemingly had little impact and have led to clashes between Pakistani authorities and Afghan National Police, ultimately reversing the fence’s purpose of improving security in the area.

IMPACT OF RECENT CHANGES ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Research from the 2019 Border study indicates that border closure has severe impacts on the livelihood strategies and local economy of communities at the border region. Recent policies imposing strict ID requirements replicate many of the impacts of border closure on these communities since they are unable to afford to cross the border. Respondents indicated that while wealthier businessmen and traders may be able to cross the border to Pakistan, other “ordinary” locals are unable to travel across the border for any reason.



P66, Wage Laborer
Gurbuz, Khost

“Ordinary people like me cannot cross the border, but the traders can cross the border with a large truck through the entry port. There are lots of changes, they have installed the razor wire and the number of border soldiers have increased, so it has become more difficult to cross the border.”

This inability to cross the border formally due to costly requirements leaves many communities with limited access to jobs, medical treatment, education, and other basic resources frequently accessed on the Pakistan side of the border. Respondents reported that the economic conditions of their area have considerably worsened in the past year due to the coronavirus outbreak and restrictions on crossing. The combination of the border fence with the strict Visa and Passport requirements has left already vulnerable border communities in a worse economic state. Existing challenges with resource access have become intensified across all four research sites due to these restrictions.

“The frequent border closures have weakened the economy of people living on both sides of the border. Prices of household items and food increased. There is poverty and unemployment in the area. There are families that are unable to meet their needs and requirements.” [P87, 36 Years Old, Male, 16 Years of Education, Customs official, Pashtun, Gurbuz, Khost]

It is evident that locals are disconcerted by the recent policies implemented near the border. The outbreak and has led to a decrease of formal trade and the transport of goods while the construction of the fence has diminished informal trade and transport in the area. The scarce supply resulting from this decrease in trade has led to increases in prices of goods across border areas.

“Formal trade faces serious problems. Foods and other supplies from other countries were imported more easily and arrived in a shorter time in the past, but now it takes weeks, because trade routes and markets have been closed, which is why the prices of goods are increased.” [P80, 26 years old, Female, Uneducated, Housewife, Pashtun, Gurbuz, Khost]

“The economic situation of people who own informal businesses was impacted because most areas are closed. People who had informal businesses are facing economic



problems, but formal businesses progressed.” [P54, 33 years old, Male, 14 years of education, Shopkeeper, Pashtun, Dand Patan, Paktia]

These impacts are notably harmful in the border regions of Khost and Paktia since they have secondary crossing points that are not always open like Torkham gate. It is worth noting however, that locals in all four sites explicitly stated that economic conditions were good until the pandemic prompted the closure of formal (closure due to the coronavirus outbreak) and informal (fence) crossing points. It seems however, that the border fence has mostly hindered all informal trade and smuggling near the border, except among smugglers who pay a bribe to border officials at the gate.

“Before the outbreak, formal trade had been conducted normally and it had created sufficient business and employment opportunities for the residents of the border region.” [P36, 20 years old, Male, 12 years of education, Wage Laborer, Pashtun, Self-employed, Dand Patan, Paktia]

“The economic situation of people who own informal businesses was impacted because most areas are closed. People who had informal businesses are facing economic problems, but formal businesses progressed.” [p54, 33 years old, Male, 14 years of education, Shopkeeper, Pashtun, Dand Patan, Paktia]

Although the 24/7 opening of Torkham gate was intended to improve traffic and Afghan access into Pakistan, the documentation requirements ultimately diminish the capacity for locals to cross into Pakistan. In terms of economic development however, the 24/7 opening has prompted an influx of crossings by Afghans from across the country with visa and passport. This increase mitigates the ill-effects of restrictions on crossing imposed by the Pakistani government observed in other border areas like Gurbuz or Dand Patan. The arrival of travelers from across Afghanistan maintains the local economy of Muhmand Dara and offers locals employment on the Afghan side of the border, somewhat abating the dependence on physically crossing into Pakistan to maintain a livelihood.

Regardless of its impacts in Torkham, the remaining border areas are pessimistic about the future. P107 cites the barbed wire fence, rather than the coronavirus outbreak, as the main problem facing the people of the region. While the region will likely eventually recover from the shock of the coronavirus outbreak, the fence is viewed as a permanent imposition with the potential to irrevocably alter the dynamics of border communities. P77 (below) expresses similar sentiments. Respondents are more likely to cite the fence rather than the pandemic as an obstacle for people in their region.



“When the way was open was for transit, the economic condition of the people had improved. All shops and hotels along the border were open and people’s works had improved. But since they closed it again people faced difficulties economically. The security situation is very satisfactory in this area and they call this place the place of peace and people come here for picnic. Before the installation of the fence people were socially in a great condition but since they installed the fence, it got worse, as I told you before.” [P77, 33 years old, male, 16 years of education, Teacher, Pashtun, Ministry of Education, Gurbuz, Khost]

IMPACT OF RECENT CHANGES ON SECURITY

Perspectives on security in the border areas are mixed. In all four regions, there are respondents who believe that security has improved while others believe it has remained the same or worsened. Most respondents in Muhmand Dara and Gurbuz believe that security is well maintained and improved. Many cite the increased police presence for the improvement in security. In Muhmand Dara, former Taliban basis have been taken over by the Afghan Local Police, their outposts in the area have increased and many individuals live without fear of insurgent groups and other criminal activity.

“Security situation in the border region improved because of the barbed wire fence, the deployment of Pakistan Army, and military operations conducted in Miran Shah because there were military bases and headquarters of anti-government elements.” [P87, 36 Years Old, Male, 16 Years of Education, Customs official, Pashtun, Gurbuz, Khost]

Among the respondents in Muhmand Dara and Gurbuz who believe the security situation has deteriorated, they primarily cite the increased insecurity due to the higher levels of unemployment in the area resulting from the coronavirus outbreak and fencing of the border.

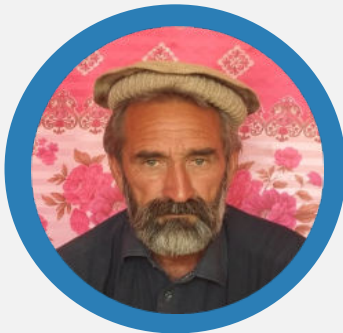
Despite the increase in Afghan police in all of the four border areas, most respondents in Dand Patan and Tanai have reported that security conditions have gotten worse. In Dand Patan, many have indicated that security is worse because insurgents have increased their attacks on Afghan security forces in their area. Remote, mountainous border areas of Dand Patan, in particular have experienced additional insecurity.

“The security situation has gotten worse over the last year when fighting used to take place between Afghan security forces and anti-government elements. This year, security is also not maintained and there is fighting in remote border communities including Maqbol. However, in Zazi area, there was not fighting last year, but this year, there is insecurity.” [P46, 60 years old, Male, 12 years of education, Local shura member, Pashtun, MRRD, Dand Patan, Paktia]



P51, a student in Dand Patan noted that the security situation has not improved despite the construction of the barbed wire fence. P54, a shopkeeper shared a similar perspective of the security situation, indicating that the erection of the fence has not prevented insurgent attacks in certain parts of Dand Patan. He explained that most recently, while security forces are busy enforcing quarantine in market and cities, check points in the area have been attacked by insurgents.

Similarly, many in Tanai believe that security has worsened since local police are fighting against the Pakistani army because of the fence. Individuals in Tanai were more dependent on informal trade and crossing than any other research site sampled in the area, accordingly individuals in Tanai have made attempts to cross the border informally despite restrictions imposed by the Pakistani regime. Many respondents in Tanai report that the Pakistani government often shoots any individual attempting to cross illegally, which ultimately exacerbates insecurity in the area. Respondents in Tanai blame the construction of the barbed wire fence for the worsened security situation and many have reported that government officials are in particular danger as they are targeted while traveling.



P100, Farmer
Tanai, Khost

“Prior to the barbed wire along the Durand Line, people of the border region had a better life. However, since the time when the above-mentioned barbed wire was constructed, our economic and security situation started to get worse day by day. The lives of those that work in government departments are in danger, because they are targeted and assassinated when they go to the city or work and on the way back home.”

The lack of resources and high unemployment in the area invites increased disputes and criminal behavior in the area. Similar to other border areas, locals in Tanai believe the pandemic in particular has fostered an increase in crime since poverty is on the rise and some people with nothing to do have even joined anti-government forces. Many individuals in Tanai believe that security is good in the center of the district but much worse in the border area. Tribal elders described that the lack of resources in the area often lead to disputes among locals which also impacts the security of the area.

“The number of disputes between people over mountains, deserts, and agricultural land, as well as irrigation water, has increased in the area, due to which a security incident causing injury or murder happens once a week.” [P98, 48 years old, Male, 10 years of education, Tribal Elder, Pashtun, None, Tanai, Khost]



“The coronavirus outbreak has caused the security situation to get worse in the border region because people join anti-government elements and commit illegal activities including theft and murder.” [P108, 25, Female, 14 years, Teacher, Pashtun, Ministry of Education, Tanai, Khost]

Among those in Tanai and Dand Patan who believe security has improved, these individuals cite the construction of the fence since the strict monitoring along the border restricts the movement of criminals and government opposition groups.

“Yes, security is maintained because Afghan local police have been assigned along the border to prevent attacks of Taliban and other insurgent groups. Security situation has gotten better throughout the district.” [P111, 26 years old, Male, 9 years of education, Student, Pashtun, Tanai, Khost]

ADJUSTMENTS TO LIVELIHOOD

Construction of the barbed wire fence has altered most of the typical livelihood strategies of locals in the area. As people are no longer able to engage in their usual livelihood strategies, many have developed alternatives to adjust to these changes. Lifestyle adjustments have been made across the selected research sites, the data suggests that locals in each area have developed strategies unique to their district to cope with the impact of border closure, visa restrictions, the covid-19 outbreak and other border events.

While many respondents described their adjustments in response to recent policies like the fence or ID requirements, the timing of field for this survey prompted respondents to discuss the impact of the pandemic on their livelihoods. The outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic led to border closure across border areas in Afghanistan. This closure led to widespread restrictions on movement and limited resource access for border locals. Despite the ill-effects of the pandemic, many respondents anticipate recovering from the effects of coronavirus, however they are less optimistic about the effects of recent policies to restrict movement across the border to Pakistan. Regardless, the amalgamation of these policies and the pandemic has had a serious impact on the vulnerable communities living near the border.

Irrespective of the cause, adjustments to livelihood are dependent on the socio-economic status of the family. While both the wealthy and working class are susceptible to recent changes at the border, respondents emphasize that there is a large contrast between lifestyles of the wealthy and the working class. The upper class can afford to adjust their livelihoods in response to changes, often having much more opportunity for economic growth. Wealthier individuals living at the border, in Torkham for example, manage large-scale factories, companies, marketplaces, and shops in which members of the working class can work. Respondents revealed that when the economy of large-scale businessmen is stable, it creates better job opportunities for the working



class. They explain that these individuals often have the means to cross the border anytime by providing documents and bribes. Wealthier families may also travel to other parts of Afghanistan for jobs or business opportunities during times of extended border closure. However, the working class are not rendered these same opportunities.

Members of the working class often rely on daily wage work (i.e. loading and unloading trucks crossing the border). Others work as truck drivers, carpenters, black smiths, and masons. In border areas, incomes of the working class are very unstable and dependent on the border. Many individuals are unemployed when the border is shut down and struggle to maintain basic needs, such as food and shelter. Furthermore, access to resources, such as healthcare and education, are limited to the working class in border regions. Many of the working class have changed spending and consumption habits to adjust to the restrictions at the border as well as the outbreak of the virus. Among those who can afford it, locals travel to other cities in the area, away from the border, to pursue employment opportunities.

MUHMAND DARA, NANGARHAR

The Mohmand Dara district is a homeland to most residents. Most families have lived in the border region for generations and inherited land from their ancestors. The economic wellbeing of the area is heavily dependent on proximity to the border. Residents regularly seek business, trade, and other economic opportunities on the other side of the border in Pakistan. In response to the construction of the barbed wire fence and document requirements many wealthier individuals at the border sent their children to attend schools in Jalalabad. Many families prefer to send students or medical patients to other areas of Afghanistan as opposed to crossing to Pakistan due to the recent policies and frequent mistreatment of Afghans at the border.

Compared to the other border areas, locals in Muhmand Dara seem to have made the least amount of adjustments to their livelihoods as a result of policies imposed by the Pakistani government. While crossing for locals without wealth and ID documents remains difficult, the 24/7 opening of the border of the border has improved the local economy overall, mitigating the negative impact of the crossing restrictions seen in other border areas. Accordingly, the majority of adjustments reported in Muhmand Dara are related to changes made in response to the coronavirus outbreak. People have reduced their social interactions, pray at home, and only go out of their homes when necessary. Many in the area have reduced their spending habits given the hinderance of business and economic growth provoked by the pandemic. Some have transitioned to farming or selling stuff within the area to make a living.

In Nangarhar, the majority of respondents indicated that the border closure due to the outbreak has led to complete halt of business and work opportunities for many families in the area. P5, a wage laborer in Muhmand Dara indicated that there are no changes in the way they have earned an income in the past few months because there is no access to work due to the outbreak. Children are unable to attend school and families at the border “simply stay at home.”



“We face a lot of difficulties. We do not have a caretaker to support the family. Now no one from our household works in the border because it is closed. Our children are not able to attend school on regular basis and it has negative effects on their education. We also have challenges in the sphere of healthcare.” [P12, Female, 45 years old, Housewife, Pashtun, Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]

Other individuals in Muhmand Dara have pursued alternate sources of income. P20, a housewife in the area explained that her sons rented a shop in Jalalabad city to conduct business while the border is closed however, they are careful to observe practices to protect themselves from the virus.

Due to the outbreak, there has been no access to education as schools are closed, but educated parents are often able to homeschool their children. The quality of healthcare in the region has also decreased since physicians and patients are both afraid of infection, ultimately limiting the amount of health care facilities available for locals in Muhmand Dara.

“Due to the outbreak of covid-19, our children cannot attend schools because they are closed. However, educated parents continue to train their children at home.” [P28, 42 years old, Male, Uneducated, Truck Driver, Pashtun/Mohmand, Self-employed, Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]

It is worth noting however, that towards the end of the field period the Torkham gate was scheduled to be re-opened – slowly reinstating the economic conditions that previously galvanized the area.

GURBUZ, KHOST

Across Gurbuz, many have adjusted their livelihoods due to the recent policies as well as the outbreak of the coronavirus in the region. People have less work since the border is closed since most employment and business opportunities in the area depend on border activity. P84, a shopkeeper from the area explained that all of the ports are closed and people in Gurbuz cannot engage in any business activities. Prior to these events, there were shops, restaurants, and guesthouses operating alongside the border but now it has all been shut down.

“Before, the way was open, businesses were operating, oil stations, hotels, shops, and other activities were going on, but now everything closed. There is nothing to do.” [P83, 28 years old, Male, 10 years of education, Shopkeeper, Pashtun, Gurbuz, Khost]



Many respondents surveyed in Gurbuz reported having reduced their eating and spending habits, with locals reporting that they only eat one meal a day and remain hungry in an effort to save money.

“Our family used to eat very good meals, but now we eat one time and stay hungry.”
[P84, 30 years old, Male, 4 years of education, shopkeeper, Pashtun, Gurbuz, Khost]

People in Gurbuz have shifted their dependence on the border as many must rely on regional resources since the Pakistan border is closed to both formal and informal crossing and trade. Despite the decrease in dependency on cross border movement, many respondents describe that there are fewer quality services in the remote border regions in Afghanistan. Some must travel to the district or Khost city to work, purchase goods, or receive medical treatment. P84, a local shopkeeper explained that every house has one or two members working in Khost city to earn a living. Without those family members providing money for their family, they would stay hungry. While the majority of individuals travel to Khost city to earn an income, others have joined local Afghan security forces in an effort to make a living.

Many in Gurbuz lament the past where they were able to cross easily to Pakistan and access goods and medical treatment on the Pakistan side of the border. Now however, P85 a trader describes, they are “adjusting to the available facilities.” Locals in Gurbuz explain that in response to the recent restrictions to crossing, clinics, schools, and roads have been built on the Afghan side of the border so that people are able to access an education without needing to cross the border.

“Yes, before when the border was opened people traveled across the border to get education and treatment, but now since many clinics, schools and roads have been built in this side of the border too, people could still get education and healthcare here.” [P64, 38 years old, Male, Illiterate, Wage Laborer, Pashtun, Self-employed, Gurbuz, Khost]

The combination of the outbreak paired with restrictions to crossing the border have left many in Gurbuz with limited options. Students in the area continue their education at home while medical patients often rely on local or at-home treatment.

DAND PATAN, PAKTIA

Respondents in Dand Patan described direct changes in their livelihood strategies from unemployment to restrictions on movement. The high prices and changes in the region have left families in the region in poverty. Respondents described children, elderly, the disabled, and other vulnerable groups begging in the streets. They also mentioned changes in buying habits and food consumption –



P47, Teacher
Dand Patan, Paktia

“We have adjusted our lifestyle to cope with all the changes mentioned above. For instance, we have reduced expenses and instead of 4 kg of potatoes which we used to buy in past we purchase two kg of potatoes now. We have decreased amount of food which we consume daily because of high prices of food items at markets.”

Most respondents in Dand Patan indicate that there has been a shift in the way income is earned in the area, many in the area have shifted toward agriculture and farming for work as wage work has decreased in the area. Similar to Gurbuz, people in Dand Patan must travel to nearby cities because there are limited opportunities in Dand Patan; many are unemployed and have no available source of income. P36, a wage laborer in Dand Patan described that only a small number of local residents have access to business opportunities and wage work due to the recent changes at the border. Accordingly, respondents articulated that locals travel to urban areas like Sapari bazar, Gardiz city, or even other provinces like Balkh and Kabul for work.

“People in the border region have adjusted their lifestyles to current circumstances, and travel to other areas for business and wage work to earn their livelihood.” [P55, 38 years old, Male, 16 years of education, Businessman, Pashtun, Paktia]

Locals in Dand Patan have made major adjustments to their lives due to the outbreak of the coronavirus, access to education and healthcare in the area worsened. All schools are closed, those who are able educate their children at home do so, but other uneducated families are left with little recourse. Most patients cannot receive appropriate medical treatment due to coronavirus; clinics are not as active. Locals describe simply “waiting out” the virus although the impacts of strict border controls have prompted similar ill-effects on the region. People in the area only travel if it is an emergency.

“The universities and schools are closed. Health care services reduced since markets and roads are also closed. Moreover, everywhere there are checkpoints. Unless someone is very sick, they cannot travel. People need health care and students are forgetting everything they learned.” [P58, 25 years old, Male, 12 years of education, Truck driver, Pashtun, Dand Patan, Paktia]



TANAI, KHOST

Compared to the other border areas, communities in Tanai have been most negatively affected by policies implemented by the Pakistani government. Given the abolishment of informal travel to Pakistan, locals have changed the way income is earned. While many used to travel to Pakistan for work as wage laborers or truck drivers in Tanai now must rely on the limited available work within the region. Many have turned to agriculture and farming to meet their basic needs while others have sought work in nearby cities.

“Farming and growing different types of crops to meet their basic needs in food and resolve other economic problems.” [P111, 26, Male, 9 years of education, Student, Pashtun, Tanai, Khost]

“Yes, now the people run small businesses in the area. However, in the past, they used to travel to Pakistan to earn an income.” [P112, 28, Female, 14 years of education, Teacher, Pashtun, Ministry of Education, Tanai, Khost]

“They moved to the city because there are more jobs in the city compared to the villages and border areas, so they must have found a way to earn an income in the city.” [P117, 25 years old, Male, Educated 16 years, Deputy of border police, Pashtun, Ministry of Defense, Tanai, Khost]

Respondents across Tanai remain despondent. Although many sought alternative sources of income, the lacking infrastructure and harsh climate has made it difficult for locals to make a living. Locals have changed their spending and eating behaviors. P94, a wage laborer describes the living conditions for people in the area – “people ate fruit and meat, but now they cannot.” They explain that their life had worsened for many people as common livelihood strategies are no longer plausible due to the restriction on informal cross-border travel.

People are just relying on God, they have been tolerating anything because they cannot do anything, they have their lord only and nobody else helps them. There are people in our area who even have not seen Khost city in the last 20 years. [P114, 22, Male, 15 years, Shopkeeper, Pashtun, Tanai, Khost]

“We have reduced our expenses and avoid wasting money on useless things.” [P115, 47 years old, Male, Illiterate, Businessman, Pashtun, Self-employed, Tanai, Khost]

Locals often complain to the government or local shura members in regard to the living conditions in Tanai that have resulted from the recent changes at the border. However, respondents like P105, a local head of shura describe experiencing the same circumstances, stressing their inability to address these issues (below).



P105, Head of Local Shura
Tanai, Khost

“There is not any other way to earn income, I am a real-life example of this. It might be considered a shame, but I don’t call it shame because it is a truth and people are hungry. Even though I am the head of the whole councils of Khost province, when my family needs flour, I have to borrow it, all people are the same here, people demand change from us, but I can do nothing.”

SUGGESTED POLICY CHANGES FROM LOCALS

Respondents across all four selected border areas indicated that other areas of Afghanistan are more developed and self-sustainable. There is sufficient infrastructure in other areas. For instance, cities have electricity, quality roads, and clean water.

There are plenty of employment opportunities in cities as well, people work as businessmen, traders, wage workers, and laborers. There are also more facilities available in cities and other urban areas, such as health clinics and education centers. Respondents stated that people in other areas also have access to agricultural land and irrigation systems. They gather crops such as vegetables and fruit for profit or personal use. Moreover, some people in other areas have formal permission to import and export produce and other goods to Pakistan.

In contrast, life in border regions is much more difficult due to inadequate infrastructure. People in border regions do not have access to agricultural land, irrigation, electricity, or clean water given the poverty and lack of resources in the area. There are less economic opportunities in border areas and many people depend on income from on the other side of the border. They rely on business, trade, and wage work when the border is open. People in the border areas also rely on other facilities and resources in Pakistan because they live too far away from cities in Afghanistan. Most border areas are deprived from necessary facilities, such as health clinics, marketplaces, and education centers. Female respondents emphasized that children in the border also do not have proper access to education when the border is closed.

“In other areas in Afghanistan, people go to school and have access to employment opportunities. Besides, they have access to clinics and electricity. However, residents of the border regions are deprived of their access to all facilities and services available in cities and urban areas. For instance, our youth do not have access to education and employment opportunities.” [FGD2, F2, Female, 48 Years Old, Pashtun, 14 Years, Midwife]



When the border is closed, most residents lose access to business, trade, and wage work. Those who can, must turn to farming and livestock to support their living. Accounts from respondents in the border area report that locals in the region have limited access to agricultural land. Moreover, the few with access to agricultural land must depend on rainfall for irrigation. Most people in region have desert lands, which they cannot irrigate. Businessmen, traders, and wage workers without land to farm or raise livestock are generally left unemployed with no available source of income when the border is closed, which causes the local economy to suffer. Respondents ask that the government and NGOs provide better agriculture assistance to the area, including irrigation systems to maintain farmlands and storage facilities and marketplaces for products.

In a similar vein, respondents indicated that the area is outfitted with very inadequate infrastructure. Respondents reported that despite the economic opportunities presented by their proximity to the border, the border area in all four districts are deprived of electricity, irrigation systems, dams, water wells, roads, and bridges.

The area also does not have proper amenities for professionals, such as doctors or educators, resulting in few available clinics and schools in the region. Border residents must travel elsewhere to receive healthcare or education. Respondents ask that the government increased funding to implement infrastructure projects and to provide economic opportunity support to the area. They also ask to open the border to Pakistan for medical patients to cross more easily without ID requirements.

Respondents in both FGDs and IDIs hold that advancements must be made in every aspect to improve life in the border region. Most respondents asked for the government and NGOs to equip clinics, workplaces, schools, and homes with working electricity, considering all modern advancements require electricity. In addition, male respondents in particular request for better quality roads, bridges, and culverts in the area. Both male and female respondents also emphasized the need for more schools in the area so that more children can receive an education. Furthermore, male and female respondents also agreed that more local clinics must be built for residents so that they do not have to travel across the border for healthcare.

It is noteworthy that several respondents mentioned dams in their request. While building dams is unlikely to be feasible in such remote areas, investments in water management and structures such as retaining walls and irrigation systems may be effective in improving the livelihood of border communities, and represent a worthwhile investment by the government and its international partners.

“There are two places that dams can be built there, one should be built in Nareze area and another one should be built in Waszhele area, these two dams can irrigate our lands and also can provide us electricity, the government comes here and survey, but they don’t start practical work yet, we have asked them for 20 years, but they don’t build



dams for us, so the government is lying, the government is not honest, the government is a thief.” [P105, 36 years old, Male, Illiterate, Local Shura Member, Pashtun, Tanai, Khost]

Infrastructure and services represent key opportunities for investment by donors and partners as Afghanistan begins its recovery from the economic impacts of COVID-19. Respondents show a keen awareness of the need to improve educational opportunities and school access in the region.

“The government should reconstruct school buildings and increase the number of professional teachers in the area. Also, the quality of textbooks also should be improved.” [P121, 35 years old, Male, 16 years of education, Executive Director, Pashtun, PAJCCI, Jalalabad, Nangarhar]



P65, Wage Laborer
Gurbuz, Khost

“If I could ask the government one thing, it would be to make the Ghulam Khan border an official gate and transit, this can help people to access employment opportunities, it will improve the trade and will directly improve the economy of the people in the region, people would be able to easily cross the border.”



P62, Provincial Official
Gurbuz, Khost

“Current policies of the of the government should be updated and reformed to ease crossing the gate via Ghulam Khan. The provincial governor has designed a proposal according to which the above-mentioned gate was open for several days. Moreover, in the near future Ghulam Khan will be promoted to a national transit gate.”



TABLE C: POLICY CHANGES REQUESTED BY LOCALS IN EACH RESEARCH SITE

Location	Areas for policy changes requested from locals	Illustrative quote
Muhmand Dara, Nangarhar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements to schools and education • Improvements to agriculture systems and assistances for farmers • Improved healthcare facilities • Increase of Job opportunities • Access to Electricity • Waiver of ID requirements for border locals 	<p>“The government should reconstruct our agriculture system and bring irrigation to dry land.” [P7, 52, Male, 12 years of education, Tribal Leader, Pashtun, Self-employed, Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]</p>
Gurbuz, Khost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of Ghulam Khan to an official gate and transit point • Improvements to schools and education • Improved healthcare facilities • Job opportunities or economic support • Waiver of ID requirements for border locals 	<p>“We want the government to provide employment opportunities. Otherwise, people must find another way of earning, which can increase insecurity. We also need them to build schools or our children.” [P84, 30 years old, Male, 4 years of education, shopkeeper, Pashtun, Gurbuz, Khost]</p>
Dand Patan, Paktia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of Khariachi pass • Security must be a priority. When security is stable, everything becomes easy. • Improved access to education and healthcare • Infrastructure improvements • Waiver of ID requirements for border locals 	<p>“We want the government to provide security, which is more important than anything else. Everything will improve if there is security.” [P52, 20 Years Old, Female, 12 Years of Education, Student, Pashto, Dand Patan, Paktia]</p>
Tanai, Khost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased spending on education • Improved healthcare services in remote border areas, more clinics, and doctors. • Economic opportunities and support • Forest Access and Rehabilitation Waiver of ID requirements for border locals 	<p>“I would ask the government to provide schools to improve their education because the younger generation is all illiterate. The youth say that they will get education if the government provide opportunities for them, even they do not have a religious Madrasah. It is a known fact that illiterate youth can cause a lot of problems for the society.” [P117, 25 years old, Male, Educated 16 years, Deputy of border police, Pashtun, Ministry of Defense, Tanai, Khost]</p>



LACK OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND TRUST IN THE STATE

Across border areas, respondents complained that infrastructure projects and other development initiatives are lacking and do not seem to benefit them. This leads to alienation and feelings of neglect: inhabitants of the border region feel disadvantaged compared to both those who live across the border and those who live in other parts of Afghanistan.

Local government corruption is the culprit often blamed for the insecurity and lack of economic prosperity in the region. Multiple FGD participants and IDI respondents described their dissatisfaction with the services of government officials, police, and other senior officials even describing them as a “strong mafia” involved in corruption. One respondent described bribery, nepotism, and embezzlement as a rampant occurrence among officials working near the border. Many claim that these officials are appointed without regard for the interests of the local people and prevent from the development of the region, taking funds from sanctioned development projects in the area.

“As mentioned above, we are not satisfied with services of MPs because they have not shared our problems with central government to find solution for. As mentioned above, we are not happy with services of the government officials including the provincial governor, Police chief and other senior officials because they are involved in corruption and work for their personal interests.” [F6, Male, 28, Pashtun, 8 Years, Mullah, Dand Patan]

Respondent across all four research sites have described the lack of effective implementation of projects by the local government. These issues are seen across activities in the border area, including inflation of employment statistics among the Afghan Local Police and government assistance (i.e. agriculture assistance) being reserved for locals in the area with connections or for those who pay bribes.

“For instance, official number of Afghan local police in the area has increased to 300 persons who are paid salaries every month but in reality, only 50 of them are present in their checkpoints and outposts therefore we have challenges in the sphere of security. Moreover, government claims that it provides foot assistance to the poor and vulnerable but in fact the assistance to given to those who pay bribe or have connections. We request the government to fight corruption and purge its department from bribery and nepotism.” [F4, Male, 57, Pashtun, 8 Years, Member of Community Council, Dand Patan]

“Only those of farmers are issued selected seeds and other agriculture assistance that have connection in the government or pay bribe. We request the government to purge its departments from corruption and pay due attention to lives of deserving farmers and provide them support on time. We also ask it to provide our access to storage facilities



and market for our agriculture products.” [P101, 46 years, Male, Illiterate, Farmer, Pashtun, Tanai, Khost]



P67, Community Leader
Gurbuz, Khost

“We have made requests to the government many times about providing water for our lands, make solar power systems for us, but the government is not working and not listening to our requests, we are hopeless. If the government wants to do something, they should first pave the district roads to ease transportation.”

Participants explain that the corruption and resource scarcity are a recipe for failure in the border areas. Many complained that over the past five years, development projects promised to locals in the area have not been implemented. Across all four border areas, locals have recalled that the government had promised a variety of infrastructure projects (i.e. road construction) but that does typically take place. When locals take their complaints to the local government, they often feel unheard and their requests are disregarded by local officials.

VIII. PROFILES OF PEOPLE AT THE BORDER

PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS

Provincial officials view the imposition of the fence by Pakistan and the requirement for passports and visas to cross the border as the most important problems facing people in the region, as these divided people who share the same religion and culture. These hardships are largely the result of Pakistani government actions, and they ask that Pakistan remove the fence and establish consulates in the border area so that people can more easily obtain visas. Officials in Torkham cite the 24/7 opening of the border as an example of the positive change they would like to see.

“People should be helped to receive visas for long term or multiple visas. It will enable them to travel to Pakistan easily. However, it would be very good if everyone is given permission to cross the boundary without any document as they did in the past.” [P121, 35 years old, Male, 16 years of education, Executive Director, Pashtun, PAJCCI, Jalalabad, Nangarhar]



“In the border region, there should be Pakistani Consulate to issue visas to local residents.” [P32, 33 years old, Female, 14 years education, Provincial Official, Tajik, Ministry of Women Affairs, Gardiz, Paktia]

“The changes have been positive, and people are happy about the border being open 24/7.” [P2, 26, Female, 14 years, Employee of Immigration Affairs Department, Pashtun, Ministry of Immigration Affairs, Jalalabad, Nangarhar]

“People living in the border area have same religion, culture and traditions, so there was no need to put a barbed wire, it prevented people’s interactions, I request to remove the barbed wire and leave the border free, so people can cross and travel easily.” [P91, 35 years old, Male, 16 years, Director of Information and Cultural Affairs, Pashtun, Ministry of Information and Culture, Tanai, Khost]

Provincial and local officials share the sense of neglect from the central government that many feel: that they are victimized by bribery and exploited by those in power on both sides of the border.

“The government is neither willing nor able to improve living conditions of the people living in the border region because it is involved in corruption and bribery.” [P32, 33 years old, Female, 14 years education, Provincial Official, Tajik, Ministry of Women’s Affairs, Gardiz, Paktia]

This sense of disempowerment largely stems from the fact that most of the recent restrictions stem from actions by the Pakistani government, which the Kabul government is perceived as lacking the power or interest to contest.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Officials in all provinces were involved with the response to the COVID-19 pandemic but had mixed views on how effective the response had been. All described similar measures, including social distancing, confining people to homes, border closures, and closures of schools and businesses. Officials also described quarantine camps set up at the border for Afghans returning from Pakistan. Pakistan had closed its border so that Afghans could not cross into Pakistan, but Afghans living in Pakistan could still return.

Officials in Nangarhar and Khost felt that people were complying with measures taken to control the pandemic, and that the government’s messaging was effective in overcoming initial skepticism. An official from Paktia, on the other hand, felt the government response was ineffective due to lack of cooperation from locals.



“They are happy about it. Although they stay at home and don’t earn an income, still they are happy about it and there are not any problems.” [P2, 26, Female, 14 years of education, Employee of Immigrations Affairs, Pashtun, Ministry of Immigrations Affairs, Jalalabad, Nangarhar]

“When there was quarantine, people in the area did not want to observe it. They were also against movement restrictions and closing shops in the bazaar. They also did not avoid close contact, handshaking and hugging out of fear of the public opinion and breaking traditions.” [P32, 33 years old, Female, 14 years education, Provincial Official, Tajik, Ministry of Women Affairs, Gardiz, Paktia]

“There are difficulties throughout Afghanistan in every respect. In the beginning people did not believe in the outbreak and considered it to be an international intrigue or project. However, now their awareness has increased due to which they observe all instructions of doctors to prevents the disease.” [P62, 42, Female, 12 years, Gender Officer, Pashtun, Provincial Office, Gurbuz, Khost]



“I think people want the way to Pakistan to open because they face problems, but in my opinion, the way should be closed until coronavirus decreases. If the way opens, healthcare groups should be assigned to quarantine people who are crossing the border before letting them go.”

P92, Director of Natural Disasters at ANDMA
Matoon, Khost

WAGE LABORERS

Wage laborers in each of the four target districts cross the border into Pakistan to do various types of work. Laborers who cross do so because more job opportunities are available in Pakistan and the pay is better than what is available locally. Some traverse the border daily, while others might stay overnight in Pakistan, or for several weeks or months.



“It is easier to find work in Pakistan. Besides laborers are paid more money for their work than in Afghanistan.” [P05, 55 Years Old, Pashtun, Wage Laborer, Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]

“Yes, I used to cross the border many times simply like going from one village to another village.” [P95, 26 years old, Male, Illiterate, Laborer, Pashtun, Tanai, Khost]

Wage laborers would do various types of manual labor in Pakistan.

“We were loading wood from here and moving it to Miranshah on the other side of the border and waited there to sell our wood and everything was going very well.” [P95, 26 years old, Male, Illiterate, Laborer, Pashtun, Tanai, Khost]

“We used to do different works including building walls and digging for pipes.” [P35, 25 years old, Male, 16 years of education, Wage laborer, Self-employed, Dand-Patan, Paktia]

The recent border restrictions, namely the fence and the requirement for visas to cross, have severely impacted wage laborers, leading to unemployment or lower wages for many. Crossing the border was easier in the past before the fence was built and formal restrictions were imposed. These changes have made crossing the border to seek work in Pakistan more difficult, particularly in the districts that lack large, formal crossing points.

“In the past when there was not barbed wire along the Durand Line, we used to go to Pakistan for wage work. Then there were not any restrictions or problems for us in that regard. However, now we are not able to cross the border into Pakistan easily.” [P35, 25 years old, Male, 16 years of education, Wage laborer, Self-employed, Dand-Patan, Paktia]

The coronavirus outbreak cut wage workers off from their main source of income both within Afghanistan and across the border. This particular population was severely impacted because they could no longer do wage work in their own communities due to isolation, social distancing, and business closures, nor could they cross the border into Pakistan for work because it was closed.

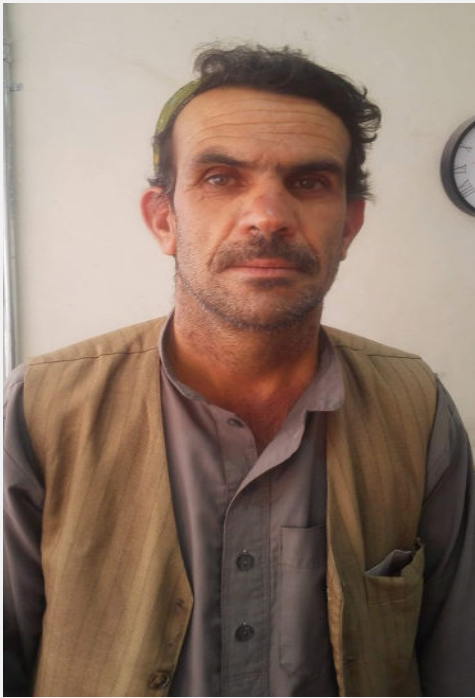


P5, Wage Laborer
Muhmand Dara, Nangarhar

“Wage work is the only source of income for my family which now we do not have access to due to the gate closures and other restrictions imposed because of the coronavirus outbreak.”



MICRONARRATIVE



**P33, Wage worker
Dand Patan, Paktia**

Participant 33, a wage worker, has been living in Dand Patan for four years. He is highly dependent on the border to support his family. For years, he and his brother would cross at Kharlachi pass to find wage work in Pakistan. He typically travels to Parinchar, Shingak, or Thal for wage work because there are more wage work opportunities on that side of the Pakistan side of the border. He is often employed by traders, the customs office, and hotel managers. As a wage worker, he often begins his day by joining his brother and looking for wage work opportunities along the border – typically working from 7 AM to 5 PM each day for roughly 300 AFN (\$3.89). It is often difficult for them to find work as people who are newer to the area, he explained that those who have connections or know people have more chances of obtaining work. He explained that given their unfamiliarity with the local traders living in the area, people often do not trust them for wage work – but when they are able to find it, they work hard and may stay in Pakistan for up to 15 – 20 days to finish a job.

Given the coronavirus outbreak, locals in Dand Patan like participant 33 are afraid to contract the virus since there are no adequate healthcare facilities to treat patients in their borderland settlement. He explained that he simply does not have the money to travel to Gardez or Kabul to access healthcare for himself or his family. Accordingly, he and his family have been diligently washing their hands with soap, using masks, and avoiding crowds of people in an attempt to combat the virus. Beyond the fears of being infected with the virus, he is concerned for the economic security of his family now that Kharlachi pass is closed; which prevents him from accessing wage opportunities in Pakistan. Currently, he and his brother try to secure work on this side of the border, however it is difficult as there are even less wage work opportunities in Afghanistan due to the decrease in activity in the area. Participant 33 explained that since the outbreak of the virus, the local economy has become weak due to restrictions on movement and trade, ultimately hindering the wage work opportunities available to people like him. He explained that people in his community are all stuck in quarantine with virtually no job opportunities. He is anxious for the gate to re-open so that things may continue as before when the Kharlachi was open and “shopkeepers, hotel workers, and laborers worked very happily.”



TRUCK DRIVERS

Truck drivers often traverse the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, with most crossing the border at least several times a month. They are keenly aware of and impacted by both the restrictions imposed by Pakistan and of measures taken more recently to combat the spread of COVID-19. Truck drivers were previously allowed to cross the border only with their tazkira or with their truck's documents, but now, like other inhabitants of the region, they are required to have passports and visas. The new border procedures also result in long waits to bring goods across the border, which can cause perishable items to rot and spoil. Each border crossing is subject to closure: recently these have occurred because of COVID-19, but in the past, they have also occurred because of disputes between the Afghan and Pakistani governments.

Visa and passport are checked, and they see car documents and forms. We wait for our number and when it is our turn, they check our documents and goods and after the legal process, we can cross the border. [P59, 28 years old, Male, 12 years of education, Truck driver, Pashtun, Dand Patan, Pakita]

Yes, of course. Most times it happens when we load vegetables or fruits, and the way is suddenly closed. Most of our goods ruin and then we face problems from the owner of goods. [P59, 28 years old, Male, 12 years of education, Truck driver, Pashtun, Dand Patan, Pakita]

"Nowadays, people travel to Pakistan with a passport and visa, but no one in our area, including those with documents, can cross the border into Pakistan. It is worth mentioning that in the past people could cross the border at Ghulam Khan with truck documents." [P118, 29 years old, Male, Illiterate, Truck driver, Pashtun, Tanai, Khost]

"There have been a lot of changes in the past few years. Crossing the border is more difficult now than ever before. We used to cross the border without any entry document, but now we cannot. It has affected traders because if we want to deliver something it does not arrive on time, vegetables and fruits become useless." [P88, 30 years old, Male, Illiterate, Truck Driver, Pashtun, Gurbuz, Khost]

Drivers in Mohmand Dara were very supportive of the decision to open Torkham Gate 24/7 and felt that they had benefitted from it.



“Yes, it was a very good and useful action because it enabled everyone to cross the border easily.” [P28, 34 years old, Male, Uneducated, Truck Driver, Pashtun (Mohmand), Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]

“Indeed, it was a useful and successful job. Our patients do not have to wait at the gate, and thus, can cross the border late at night. This move has also resulted in reduction of traffic.” [P30, 34 years old, Male, Uneducated, Truck Driver, Pashtun (Mohmand), Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]

Truck drivers in all four of the target districts reported not being able to earn a living or transport goods during the coronavirus lockdown period due to road and border closures.

“Yes, it has affected my work as a truck driver, all roads are closed, and our trucks are parked at home.” [P89, 37 years old, Male, 5 Years of education, Truck Driver, Pashtun, Gurbuz, Khost]

“Yes, due to coronavirus we observe distance, abstain from interaction with others and follow instructions of doctors. Besides, it has ended our access to business and employment opportunities.” [P120, 35 Years Old, Male, Illiterate, Truck Driver, Pashtun, Self-Employed, Tanai, Khost]



MICRONARRATIVE



P28, Truck driver
Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar

P28, a Truck Driver, has been living in Muhmand Dara for generations. His family is highly dependent on the border and his job as a truck driver. He has traveled to Pakistan many times for his job and has taken goods all the way from Torkham to Lahore and Karachi. Most frequently, his export cargo is made up of goods like macaroni, biscuits, and fresh produce. He often takes fruit to the border, stopping on the Ring Road or at warehouses in Pakistan. He also transports goods from Pakistan back to Afghanistan including bottles of non-alcoholic beverages. He and his family are directly affected by the 24/7 opening of the gate as it has given him increased opportunities for work. He explained that the gate opening has allowed people and vehicles can cross the gate at any time. Given that businessmen can import and export their goods more frequently and in a timely manner, truck drivers are hired to take their goods to different locations in Pakistan. P28 clarified however that the opening is only beneficial for people who have a passport and visa – especially businessmen. Unlike before, refugee cards and Tazkira are no longer acceptable forms of ID for crossing, which prevents many members of his community from crossing as it is “very difficult to get passports because of a long and complicated procedure.”

He is thankful to have a passport and visa which allows him to cross easily for work. The opening of the gate has made his job easier, improving traffic and the crossing process. He described that his passport and visa are checked and stamped by both Afghan and Pakistani border officials, once all the documents are checked he is able to take his truck to the other side of the border. He explained that some procedures had been eliminated for instance, trucks were once stopped at checkpoints and taxed by police. Now however, the owner of the goods is responsible for paying the taxes – rather than the truck drivers. He has noticed that since the opening of the gate, there has been less instances in which he was required to pay a bribe to officials at formal and informal checkpoints. In cases where there are issues or discrepancies between goods or items reported, trucks might be stopped for extended periods of time. Besides this, the only other issue is in the event of border closure, which has major adverse effects on truck drivers as well as the goods they transport, which expire or spoil after extended periods of time. Most recently, the coronavirus outbreak has led to extended border closure of Torkham gate. He lamented that due to the closure their economic conditions are very poor, his truck had been stopped at the local pump stations for months. He has heard that different measures have been taken near the border like vehicles and trucks are sprayed with disinfectant and many drivers have been provided with PPE. Despite these measures, he asserted that his family has had no income or work since the outbreak. He and his family have been receiving assistance from wealthier individuals who distribute food items to them.



TRIBAL AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Tribal and community leaders sit atop traditional structures of authority in the border region, and locals still look to them for guidance. Religious scholars are also included in this group, as they provide counsel and support to people in the region and are also trusted figures in the community. Their insights are therefore important to include in this research. In former times, certain tribes were seen as having better accessibility to services and locations on the Pakistan side of the border, but now all tribes are cut off from access to Pakistan because of the barbed wire fence and administrative restrictions that make it difficult, expensive, and time-consuming to cross the border. This has worsened recently due to the coronavirus pandemic, but this dynamic was present before the pandemic, and is likely to remain afterwards. Tribes that had previously crossed the border more often due to having people or lands on both sides of the border have been especially severely impacted.

“Yes, the Mangal tribe living close to the border has better accessibility to the other side of the border, the Maqbola tribe have shared lands on both sides of the border but cannot cross the border.” [P37, 55 years old, Male, 12 years of education, Tribal leader and commander of local uprising group, Pashtun (Jaji), National Directorate of Security, Dan-e-Patan, Paktia]

“No, none of them can cross the border.” [P98, 48 years old, Male, 10 years of education, Tribal Elder, Pashtun, None, Tanai, Khost]

The coronavirus outbreak has sharply limited local leaders’ abilities to provide services to residents and resolve disputes.

“Due to the outbreak, we avoid attending wedding parties and funeral ceremonies. Besides, we cannot hold meetings and gatherings. We always stay at home doing nothing. However, in the past, I used to mediate between opposing sides and resolved their disputes peacefully.” [P97, 70 years old, Male, 12 years of education, Tribal Elder, Pashtun, Tanai, Khost]



P37, Tribal Elder &
Commander of Local Uprising Group

“It has affected a lot: in the past we had Jirga once in a week in our district, but after healthcare services guided us to keep distance and don’t join Jirga or any other gathering due to coronavirus, so now we don’t even hold a jirga once in a month, it has affected our job and leadership because we cannot solve people’s problems in a timely manner.”



Taken together, the border closures and restrictions, along with measures taken to control the spread of COVID-19, have severely curtailed traditional leaders' abilities to meet the needs of people in the border districts: this is because traditional dispute resolution and decision-making mechanisms relied heavily on holding meetings such as jirgas in-person, and their responsiveness to the people of their area rests upon their ability to be in close contact with them, all of which are harmed by the pandemic.

Local leaders also speak of lack of support from the government and NGOs during the pandemic period. In view of all these difficulties and limitations on their ability to serve their communities, they perceive their main duties during the pandemic as providing information to local people on how to prevent the spread of the coronavirus and combatting erroneous beliefs about it.

"We are not satisfied with services provided to us by the government and NGOs, including your office, because you merely conduct surveys, promise and make empty pledges but never have adopted practical steps to help people in resolving their problems. The international community makes fun of us and takes pleasure from our conditions and sufferings because it is not willing to prevent corruption and provide economic support to needy, vulnerable and indigent families." [P98, 48 years old, Male, 10 years of education, Tribal Elder, Pashtun, None, Tanai, Khost]

"Yes, we have taken measures and guided other people not to participate in gatherings, wear masks, and wash hands consistently, what we hear from the media, we implement". [P37, 55 years old, Male, 12 years of education, Tribal leader and commander of local uprising group, Pashtun (Jaji), National Directorate of Security, Dan-e-Patan, Paktia]



**P99, Religious Scholar
Tanai, Khost**

"The coronavirus outbreak is a general pandemic, which also used to take place in the past. At the time of Mohammad (peace be upon him) and Omar there were also epidemic illnesses that caused people to die. According to a saying, the Prophet ordered people to abstain from traveling to those areas affected by pandemics. It is a false idea that Muslims are immune or protected from infection by coronavirus because every human being becomes ill by nature or contaminated by viruses. However, we believe everyone dies at the time which is appointed for him or her."



MICRONARRATIVE



**P38, Tribal Elder
Dand Patan, Paktia**

Participant 38 is a Farmer and Tribal Elder of the Zazai tribe who has been living in Dand Patan for over 70 years. He explained that he has been living in the border area throughout the different changes that have occurred over time – before the installation of the barbed wire fence and after the barbed wire fence. He described that life was a lot different before the fence was erected. For years, people would travel back and forth easily as they share a tribe with the people living on the other side of the border. Before, many locals in his district would engage in trade and related work opportunities on the other side of the border. Now however, their relationships have been cut off- only interacting with their fellow tribesman in Pakistan on an as-needed basis. He explained that many people no longer engage in trade due to the fence, and typically only tribal leaders cross back and forth for negotiations and jirgas when problems arise. Tribesmen from the Afghan side of the border will some time cross to attend meetings in Pakistan and vice versa. Despite the abrupt division between the two sides of the border, he assures that they have a good relationship with members of the Zazai tribe living on the other side as well as other tribes who live there. He explained, that they have been able to maintain the good security in the Zazai area because of their good relations with all of the tribes living on the other side of the border, “the other tribe that lives on the other side of the line are Shia and they are very good people and don’t create problems for us.”

As a tribal elder, he has spent his life in the tribal system along with his family. He has worked to support the tribe and activities at the border in accordance with tribal agreements. Along with fellow tribal elders, he has worked with the community to create job opportunities for locals in the area. His family owns a shop near the border that brings in a monthly income of about 5,000 Afghanis – his nephews work as taxi drivers to transport locals from one place to another, but their income is very low. Accordingly, much of the family depends on the shop and their agriculture for their economic well-being. He considers his community to be less dependent on crossing the border to Pakistan – he explained that since the bulk of refugees returned from Pakistan, locals never cross the border to Pakistan for education or labor – only medical treatment. He, personally, has not even crossed the border in over a year.

Since the outbreak, his son’s shop has been closed and his family have been forced to revert to a traditional lifestyle earning most of their income from selling their crops including vegetables, wheat, and rice. People in his community are working hard to adjust their lifestyles as result of the pandemic however, he is gravely concerned by the outbreak. If the situation continues, he says, people will die of hunger since people are very poor and prices have sky-rocketed since the outbreak.



FARMERS

Despite the dry climate, isolation, and poor infrastructure of the border region, farmers still eke out a living there. Most farm small plots and grow crops such as wheat, rice, corn, fruit, and vegetables, and also raise livestock such as cattle, sheep, and goats.

“There are no improved seeds and no agricultural treatment. People are poor and the government does not pay attention to them. Last year, disease destroyed the wheat crops, but no one paid attention to this issue.” [P70, 44 years old, Male, 7 years of education, Farmer, Pashtun, Gurbuz, Khost]

“We do not have enough water for irrigation, enough seeds and also there are no machines that we need.” [P10, 20 years old, Male, X years of education, Farmer, Pashtun (Mohmand), Self-employed, Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]

“The primary challenges for farmers are lack of dams, fertilized seeds, and lack of markets for farmer’s crops.” [P41, 35 Years Old, Male, Illiterate, Farmer, Pashtun, Self-employed, Dand-e- Patan, Paktia]



P71, Farmer
Gurbuz, Khost

“We do not have access to water for irrigation. We are not happy with the services of the government in the field of the agriculture, because it is not able to provide us selected seed and fertilizer as well as other assistance.”

When possible, most farmers in the border region take their crops and livestock to Pakistan for sale, because goods can be sold there for a higher profit.

“Selling in Pakistan is more profitable, and the traders here buy our crops cheaply, so we have to sell our crops in Pakistan.” [P11, 50 years old, Male, Illiterate, Farmer, Pashtun (Mohmand), Self-employed, Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]



“In the past when there was not the barbed wire fence along the border, we would take more than half of our agriculture and livestock products to Miran Shah which is faraway from here.” [P101, 46 years, Male, Illiterate, Farmer, Pashtun, Tanai, Khost]

However, crossing the border informally with crops or livestock is no longer possible, and crossing formally often is not either, even with a passport and visa, because of frequent border closures, such as the recent one to counter the spread of COVID-19. These changes have severely hindered farmers’ ability to make a profit from their crops.

“Yes, I sell them there. I myself take the crops there and when I sell them all, I return back.” [P11, 50 years old, Male, Illiterate, Farmer, Pashtun (Mohmand), Self-employed, Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]

“In the past, we used to sell our products but now we cannot sell it because the border is closed, and we are not allowed to cross and sell our products.” [P41, 35 Years Old, Male, Illiterate, Farmer, Pashtun, Self-employed, Dand-e- Patan, Paktia]

“In the past, when there was not the barbed wire fence along the border, we were able to take our agriculture and livestock products to that side of the boundary, namely Miran Shah where they had good market. Besides, we used to take milk cows there for selling. However, now we cannot cross the frontier for any purposes including business and trade because Pakistan fenced it two years ago.” [P101, 46 years, Male, Illiterate, Farmer, Pashtun, Tanai, Khost]

Perhaps even more so than other border residents, farmers are impacted by border closures and other restrictions because of their reliance on taking their agricultural products to Pakistan for sale in a timely manner.

“At the present time, we are not able to take our products to Pakistan for trade through crossing the border in our area due to the barbed wire along it. Besides, we do not have access to cold storage or other facilities to keep our agricultural products in after harvest, so our crops get spoiled and go rotten on the ground and no one wants to buy them in the area.” [P100, 47 years old, Male, Illiterate, Farmer, Pashtun, Self-employed, Tanai, Khost]

COVID-19 also had a large impact on farmers’ work because they cannot sell their crops in the marketplace or transport them along the roads due to restrictions on movement imposed by the



government. Many farmers tell of crops rotting or going bad due to inability to take them to market and lack of cold storage facilities.

“No, except farming, we do not have access to other sources of income because all routes are closed, and no one is able to cross the border for any purposes including business and trade. Besides, we do not have access to sufficient water for irrigation in the area. ... Moreover, neither government nor NGOs is willing to implement reconstruction or community development projects to improve local residents’ economic state and create employment opportunities for them to earn their livelihoods.” [P101, 46 years, Male, Illiterate, Farmer, Pashtun, Tanai, Khost]

MICRONARRATIVE



**P71, Farmer
Gurbuz, Khost**

Participant 71 is a farmer who has been living in Gurbuz for generations, his ancestors migrated there from Zadran. He and his family grow wheat, potatoes, onions, eggplant, peas, and corn on their farm in Gurbuz. They also raise cattle for meat and milk products. He and his family have been greatly impacted by the coronavirus outbreak – they have lost a lot of income since they are not able to take their fruits and other crops to Miran Shah, Pakistan where, he says, they have a good market for selling produce. Now, he explained, they are compelled to sell their crops for very cheap in Khost since none of the farmers in the area are able to export their crops to the other side of the border. Due to these restrictions and the loss of income, many farmers, including P71, have been compelled to seek wage work in different districts in Khost province, where they often make very little money for their work due to the widespread unemployment and poverty.

Participant 71 described many of the struggles for farmers in the area. His farm does not have access to water for irrigation and he does not receive any assistance from the government in terms of provision of seeds or fertilizers. The coronavirus has exacerbated their troubles because of the restrictions on movement and social interaction. For instance, he and fellow farmers used to gather their harvest together and in close cooperation but now due to corona, they must do all of their harvesting and farm work on their own – in an effort to protect themselves from the virus.



HOUSEWIVES

Lack of healthcare came up often in the research as the main problem facing women in the border region. Healthcare is cited as the main reason for crossing into Pakistan, along with visiting relatives. These reasons were consistent across all four districts included in the study.

“Women cross the border to receive medical treatment. Some travel to Pakistan for work. Moreover, they cross the border to visit relatives living in Pakistan.” [P14, 45 Years Old, Female, Uneducated, None, Pashtun/Mohmand, None, Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]

“Women cross the border into Pakistan for treatment and to visit relatives and friends. They also used to cross to sell their handicrafts, but now the roads are closed, and they cannot cross.” [103, 35, Female, Uneducated, Housewife, Pashtun, None, Tanai, Khost]

“Women usually cross the border to receive medical attention because the treatment here is of low quality.” [P42, 20 years old, Female, 12 years of education, Unemployed, Pashtun, Dand Patan, Paktia]

Women in the border region also lack access to essential services such as education protection from gender-based violence. Women in all parts of Afghanistan struggle with these and similar issues, but women in Mohmand Dara, Gurbuz, and Tanai feel that they are disadvantaged compared to women in other parts of the country. By contrast, women in Dand Patan feel that women throughout the country face similar problems.

“Women living in other parts of Afghanistan have access to education but in the border region, they are completely deprived of this right.” [P14, 45 Years Old, Female, Uneducated, None, Pashtun/Mohmand, None, Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]

“Most women in other parts of the country have the same problem, lack of female doctors. Even if there are female doctors, there are not enough.” [P42, 20 years old, Female, 12 years of education, Unemployed, Pashtun, Dand Patan, Paktia]

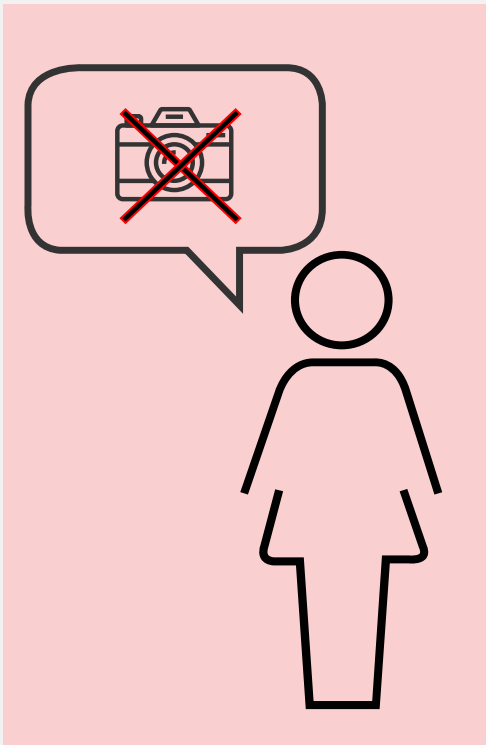
“Women living elsewhere in Afghanistan do not have to work hard, they are educated and have access to services, but we do not.” [103, 35, Female, Uneducated, Housewife, Pashtun, None, Tanai, Khost]

“Women living elsewhere in Afghanistan have access to education and to different types of courses, but we do not.” [P73, 31 years old, Female, Illiterate, Housewife, Pashtun, Gurbuz, Khost]



However, few of the women interviewed indicated that women crossed the border to Pakistan to receive women's or maternal healthcare, suggesting that they are going for healthcare generally or to treat illnesses, rather than for issues that impact them as women specifically.

MICRONARRATIVE



P20, Housewife
Muhmand Dara, Nangarhar

P20 is a housewife who lives in Mohmand Dara with her husband, four sons, and eight grandchildren. While her husband is a farmer, two of her sons conduct informal trade along the border, and her other two sons have a shop in Torkham city. Her family also receives some income from their agriculture land in the area. She admits that her family is wealthier than most border area families and because that, her grandchildren are able to attend school in Jalalabad.

She explained that the outbreak of the coronavirus and the accompanying border closure has changed the dynamics of her family very much, her sons who typically work near the border have rented a shop in Jalalabad city to pursue an alternative income during the border closure. Sometimes her sons have to travel to Weash to buy inventory and transport it to their shop in Jalalabad since the Torkham border is closed. Despite her sons' efforts to continue their business, shop closures and lockdown regulations have left male members of her family at home. She explained that the presence of her the men at home for extended periods of time have made her life and the lives of her daughters-in-laws "inconvenient" because the men often get angry at the children which prompts tension and disrupts typical household dynamics.

P20 also described her experiences crossing the border at Torkham gate prior to the outbreak. She explained that when she traveled to Pakistan for medical treatment, she was required to wait a very long time to be granted entry into Pakistan. She mentioned that when Afghans cross the border, "Pakistani police and other border officials mistreat and humiliate them without any reason." She also shared the experience of another friend in her community who fell ill and tried to go to Pakistan for emergency medical treatment. However, since her friend did not have a passport and visa, she was denied entry despite her begging and pleading to Pakistani border officials. Her friend was ultimately forced to receive treatment in Jalalabad. Given these experiences, P20 requests that the government establishes a health center in the area and equip it with ambulances and advanced medical technology that can identify which patients should be permitted to travel to Pakistan for medical treatment without a passport or visa.



TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

The primary reasons for crossing the border for education-related reasons is lack of access to schools on the Afghan side of the border. Although the regions on the Pakistani side of the border are also marginalized, they are perceived as having infrastructure and services that are both cheaper and of better quality, with many respondents expressing the view that schools on the Pakistan side are cheaper and of better quality.

“They also have their own problems, but their problems are less than ours.” [P77, 33 years old, male, 16 years of education, Teacher, Pashtun, Ministry of Education, Gurbuz, Khost]

“There are more education facilities in the Pakistan side of the border, they have good equipment, and better schools so they provide qualified education for students, but the facilities are not here.” [P74, 28 years old, Female, 12 years of education, Teacher, Pashtun (Gurbuz), Gurbuz, Khost]

“It’s cheaper.” [P21, 19 years old, Male, 12 years of education, student, Pashtun (Mohmand), Ministry of Education, Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]’

Schools in the border area are also seen as worse-off than those in other parts of Afghanistan.

“The quality of education is very low here in comparison to schools in other areas of Afghanistan. More attention has been paid to those schools, but in border areas, schools are very low quality and people, especially students face many problems.” [48, 24, Female, 14 years, Teacher, Pashtun, Education Directorate, Dand Patan, Paktia]

The key challenges faced by students crossing into Pakistan to get education are border closures, transportation difficulties, and restrictions on crossing imposed by the Pakistani authorities.

“Yes, there are. Sometimes, the students encounter transportation problems and thus cannot cross the border. Mostly, there are problems between the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan which closed the border. This also prevents the students from crossing the border.” [P18, 40, Female, 14 years of education, Teacher, Mohmand, Education Directorate, Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]

“Yes, before they were not asking for passports or visas when students were crossing for education, but now, no one can cross to study without a passport and visa.” [P22, 18, Female, 12 years of education, Student, Pashtun, Directorate of Education, Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]



“Yes, I know such a person. This person has experienced lack of transportation. As the destination is too far, so he could not walk there. Another important problem along the border is searching by Pakistani officers. Previously, he had a special [student] ID Card and uniform which let him cross the border easily; however, the students do not have these things now.” [P18, 40, Female, 14 years of education, Teacher, Mohmand, Education Directorate, Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]

As in other parts of the world, COVID-19 has had a severe disruptive effect on schools, students, and teachers in the border region. Schools were closed due to the pandemic. Schools attempted broadcasting lessons on the radio, but with limited success due to lack of access. Schools in Pakistan were also reported to be impacted.

“It has resulted in closure of the schools. Thus, no one can receive an education. The outbreak has made our students to fall behind in their programs.” [P17, 67 years old, Male, 14 years of education, Teacher, Pashtun (Mohmand), Education Directorate, Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]

“Yes, it has affected a lot; all schools are closed, and students stay at home. If people have access to educational radio programs, they can study and if people do not have access to the radio, they cannot follow those programs. Most of student in our province do not have access to those programs.” [P48, 24, Female, 14 years, Teacher, Pashtun, Education Directorate, Dand Patan, Paktia]

However, the research also suggests that if educational opportunities are improved in communities on the Afghan side of the border, fewer students will go to Pakistan to seek education.

“This could have been a reason for going there but the main reason was lack of schools here, which has been resolved now.” [P77, 33 years old, male, 16 years of education, Teacher, Pashtun, Ministry of Education, Gurbuz, Khost]



MICRONARRATIVE



**P111, Student
Tanai, Khost**

Participant 111, a student, has been living in Tanai for generations, his ancestors were also born in Tanai and grew up in the area. Apart from being a student, sometimes he drives his taxi to make money for his family. He began his academic journey in Pakistan, where he attended four classes, however due to financial problems he was not able to complete his education there. He now attends school in Afghanistan, explaining that many other students similar to him do not cross the border for education purposes anymore due to the barbed wire fence. Local students cannot afford the costs associated with crossing to Pakistan nor can they afford many of the tuition and school fees in Pakistan. He explained that students living in the border region face challenges in different aspects including lack of access to educational materials and infrastructure (i.e. textbooks and classrooms). Beyond the lack of equipment, the number of qualified teachers available to teach students is also deficient in the area.

Education is just one of the many problems people in his community face. The 26-year-old student explained that people in the area do not have access to potable water, irrigation or employment opportunities. He described that in the past, before the fence, many students and workers crossed into Pakistan – workers would take timber and precious stones to for trade, and students would cross to pursue higher quality education. The outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic has worsened conditions for students, who are no longer able to attend school since all buildings are closed.



MEDICAL PATIENT

In each of the target districts, medical facilities are generally reported to be in short supply and lacking in quality and essential equipment. Respondents express the view that if this situation could be improved, such as by the government building new hospitals in the district or providing modern medical equipment, the need to travel to Pakistan for medical treatment would diminish.

People who are injured or fall seriously ill must travel to either a major Afghan city or to Pakistan to seek treatment. In either case, the patient faces a long, difficult, and sometimes expensive journey. Several respondents mentioned having to pay bribes to the Pakistani authorities.

“Yes, people are compelled to bribe officials of Pakistan Consulate in Kabul as well as in Jalalabad to get visas. This is because Afghans applying for a visa are mistreated and even humiliated by Pakistani officials in the consulate. They mistreat Afghans to pave the way for bribery.” [P49, 26 years old, Male, 16 years of education, Unemployed, Pashtun, Dand Patan, Paktia]

Long waits and time-consuming visa procedures are also common experiences for people seeking medical treatment in Pakistan. No respondents mentioned crossing informally to receive medical treatment.

“It has become more difficult to cross the border for medical treatment because it takes a long time, a lot of efforts, energy and money to get passport and visa. Besides, everyone including medical patients having passport and visa must take turn and wait for a long time to be allowed to cross the border.” [P20, 50 years old, Female, Illiterate, Housewife, Pashtun, Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]

COVID-19 related border restrictions prevented border crossing for any reason, including to receive treatment in Pakistan. The pandemic has also caused people to avoid hospitals and doctors’ offices for fear of exposure to the virus.

“Once, a woman living in the border region was sick and her husband decided to take her to Pakistan for medical treatment, but they did not have passport and visa, therefore they started to beg Pakistani border officials to give them permission to be able to cross the gate to receive healthcare in Pakistan on time. But their request was rejected, and the husband was compelled to take his sick wife to Jalalabad city where she was provided treatment.” [P20, 50 years old, Female, Illiterate, Housewife, Pashtun, Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]



MICRONARRATIVE



**P109, Medical Patient
Tanai, Khost**

Participant 109 is a medical patient living in Tanai, Khost. He has been living in Tanai with his family for generations, where he works as a carpenter. He and his family were very happy living in the area and were able to travel to Pakistan freely, now however, he is saddened by the installation of the fence at the border which prevents them from easily accessing medical treatment and work on the other side of the fence. He explained that many people travel across the border to Pakistan for medical treatment because there are not good doctors or clinics located in their area. He noted that they unfortunately lose many sick people in the community due to the lack of experienced doctors and good medicine. Roughly two months ago, P109 became seriously ill and had to travel to Islamabad, Pakistan for medical treatment. He already had a passport, so he went to the Pakistan embassy in Kabul and applied for a visa, he was able to secure the visa quickly and cross into Pakistan via Torkham gate. In the past, he explained, all that was necessary was an ID card but now a passport and visa is required. He explained that his trip across the border was fine given that he had the necessary ID documents for crossing. Despite the ease of his trip, he would request that the government not ask for a passport and visa from medical patients crossing the border. He says that they should be allowed to cross with an ID card or other more easily accessible documents.

As a medical patient, he does not go to the hospital unless it is absolutely necessary due to fears of being infected with the coronavirus. People in his area have not crossed the border for treatment since the outbreak. He has not been working since the virus is “very dangerous.” He takes serious precautions to protect himself from the virus and has not been to the mosque or interacted with friends in family for a long time. Like many people, he is looking forward to the end of the pandemic so that living conditions in his area will improve.



BUSINESSMEN

Many businessmen report that they used to cross the border to conduct trade but no longer do. Instead, they place and receive orders by phone or internet and then have them shipped.

“Nowadays, all routes are closed, and no one can cross the border for any purposes, including business and trade, therefore we conduct online trade via telephone or internet.” [P55, 38 years old, Male, 16 years of education, Businessman, Pashtun, Paktia]

“Nowadays, all the businesses are done by telephone, when we want materials, we just make some calls to the companies and they load the trucks and send the materials to us, we don’t go there ourselves. [P116, 49 years old, Male, 12 years of education, Businessman, Pashtun, Self-employed, Tanai, Khost]

When asked what the one thing they would like the government to provide to traders and businessmen would be, respondents in this sector were most likely to mention easing border restrictions on both people and goods.

“We would request to open the border legally; formal visas should be provided and there should be other facilities for traveling too. During President Ghani’s Campaign, our elders discussed this issue and he promised to solve this issue for us.” [P53, 35 years old, Male, 14 years of education, Shopkeeper, Pashtun (Zazai), Self-Employed, Dand Patan, Paktia]

Like other people in the border region, businessmen express the view that they are harmed by border closures, because they cannot ship their goods across. They must then pay rent on a warehouse, and perishable goods may rot or spoil. The recent pandemic has been a period where businessmen faced this challenge due to the border closure and restrictions on movement.



P85, Trader
Gurbuz, Khost

“We have not traveled through the Ghulam Khan port from many years due Taliban and terrorist attacks in North Waziristan. Many traders were kidnapped, killed and their goods were taken and destroyed. I will explain a story from a Torkham trip. I took a Pakistan visa for 500 dollars and crossed the border, imported one truck of goods and the rest was blocked at the border, and it is still blocked there, these goods are seasonal and if it is not imported now, then I would have to keep it in warehouse and pay rent for the warehouse, and my expenses will go up.”



MICRONARRATIVE



**P23, Shopkeeper
Muhmand Dara, Nangarhar**

P23 is a local shopkeeper in Muhmand Dara selling cleaning products & hygiene items (soap, shampoo etc.) at his store located along the border. His family has been living in the border area for over six centuries. He grew up only 25 kms from the boundary noting that living near the border makes his family feel secure because it provides more reliable business and employment opportunities. P23 explained that his daily business is directly linked to activity at the border. Accordingly, the outbreak of Covid-19, which prompted border closure in Torkham has had seriously adverse effects on his shop. Not only did the border closure seriously reduce the regular movement of people who patronize his business, it has also caused lots of imports to be stuck on the Pakistan side of the border. This lack of wholesale supply has led to major increases in inventory costs which has hindered his business. The decrease in formal trade has affected him not only as a businessman but also as a consumer, he described “in the past, when the border was open, one bag of sugar cost 2800 or 2900 Rs, but now it costs 5000 Rs.” Beyond the economic consequences of the coronavirus, he explained that he and fellow shopkeepers cannot run their shops with confidence, as they are fearful of being infected with the coronavirus. Shopkeepers use masks and wash their hands repeatedly with soap so that both them and their family members do not get Covid-19. Not only are shopkeepers afraid of the virus, P23 cited that customers shop much less frequently due to quarantine and explained that when they do come to his store, they shop with much fear and precaution.

Prior to the outbreak however, he explained that his shop has benefitted from the 24/7 opening of Torkham gate. He explained that the policy change has prevented delays of imports, allowing him to receive merchandise in a timely manner. The opening of the gate has also increased his business as the influx of travelers patronize his store. Despite these benefits, P23 indicated that he is personally unable to travel to Pakistan since he does not have a passport and visa. He believes that the government should allow people to cross the border more easily and that shopkeepers should be allowed to cross the border using a Tazkira (Afghan National ID card). He also explained that the taxes on goods should be reduced to make prices lower for businessmen and shopkeepers which would ultimately translate to savings for locals in the border area.



BORDER POLICE/CUSTOMS OFFICIALS

At major border crossings, Afghans must have a passport and visa to cross into Pakistan. At some smaller crossing points like Ghulam Khan or Kharlachi, only a token or invitation from someone in Pakistan is required.

“As mentioned above, anyone who wants to cross the border must produce passport and visa. Besides, they do not have criminal background or case.” [P27, 51 Years Old, Male, 16 Years of Education, Customs official, Pashtun, Customs Department, Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]

“Certain individuals come from Shar-e-naw to the Sapari border bazar which is 2 or 3 km for away from the Durand Line. From there the said persons travel by cars to the frontier line or barbed wire fence where after checking their Tazkira they are given tokens by which they can travel to Pakistan. However, when they come back, they return the said tokens to Army officials who give them back their Tazkira. When they approach Afghan security checkpoints or outposts on this side of the boundary, they are asked to show Tazkira and explain why, when and how they crossed the border into Pakistan. If they are suspicious, we detain them in our custody for further inquiry otherwise they can go anywhere they want.” [P57, 29 years old, Male, 4 years of education, Border Police, Pashtun, Ministry of Education, Dand Patan, Paktia]

They are responsible for protecting the border, facilitating legitimate trade, and preventing smuggling, but they often lack the equipment to do this effectively, and corruption is a problem.

“There should some type of technical devices which must be installed near the gate to detect goods and items smuggled by high ranking government officials.” [P27, 51 Years Old, Male, 16 Years of Education, Customs official, Pashtun, Customs Department, Muhmand Dara, Nangarhar]

“The government should install scanning machines and doors at the border gates so that coming goods and people can be easily scanned to prevent destructive materials and persons, and also the government should install weighing machines to control the vehicle in order to do not load more and don't destroy roads.” [117, 25, Male, 16 years, Deputy of border police, Pashtun, Ministry of Defense, Tanai, Khost]

“There is widespread corruption in the customs house which should be prevented or eliminated. The gate should become formal and transit one. Also, a Consulate should be open here. The main road should be reconstructed because people from Gardez city



cannot arrive on time.” [P57, 29 years old, Male, 4 years of education, Border Police, Pashtun, Ministry of Education, Dand Patan, Paktia]



P57, Afghan Border Police
Dand Patan, Paktia

“Before the barbed wire fence along the boundary 200 or 300 persons used to cross the border and travel to Pakistan. However, now due to the above-mentioned fence this number has been reduced to 5 or 10 persons now. However, local inhabitants want to cross the border into Pakistan for different reasons including visiting their relatives and family members. However, Afghans are mistreated and abused under different pretexts in Pakistan.”

Customs officials and border guards differed as to the impact of the pandemic on their work or in their respective areas.

“Due to the outbreak, customs employees do not attend their offices.” [P27, 51 Years Old, Male, 16 Years of Education, Customs official, Pashtun, Customs Department, Muhmand Dara, Nangarhar]



MICRONARRATIVE



**P117, Border Police Officer
Tanai, Khost**

P117 is a border police officer who was stationed in Tanai, Khost. He described that when he first arrived in the border region for his duty, he was shocked to see the extent to which people in the border area live in extreme poverty. He described that people in the area travel on donkeys for kilometers to access clean water. Early in his deployment, he would ask youth on the streets why they were not at school, but the children simply indicated that there were not any schools in the area for them to attend. P117 explained that people in the area do not even have access to religious madrassas to attend and requested that the government provide opportunities for Tanai youth to receive an education.

Since the erection of the fence, he explained, people in Tanai are not currently dependent on the border, and the economy is now much more dependent on livestock and agriculture. He explained that since the fence has completely severed their former livelihood activities, lots of people in the area migrated to Khost city while others have joined the Afghan National Security Forces in an effort to adjust their lifestyles to the recent changes. P117 asserted that the fence has exacerbated the poverty and infrastructure challenges in Tanai. The police officer explained that while locals are able to come out and protest the fence and its harmful consequences, they are not permitted to go to Pakistan.

Prior to the fence, he described, over 100 people from the area would cross into Pakistan in a given day, many would go to Miranshah to receive medical care or meet other basic needs. Now however, these locals travel to Khost city or Kabul to access these resources. While the fence has had very negative impacts on the border community in Tanai, the coronavirus has arrived to exacerbate the troubles in the border area. P117 explained that police forces were instructed to forcibly close the roads in the area, not allowing anyone to enter or exit the city. While he and fellow officers have made efforts to control the population and enforce quarantine, he does not think that their work will have much of an effect on the locals – since many of them do not take the coronavirus seriously. He noted that many people “have tried to go to the city in secret” despite police orders to stay put. P117 contended that the security situation in the area is troublesome and that border police must increase their searches and patrols especially when the road to Pakistan is open. He explained that police are stationed 24 hours a day at gates along the Durand line because “Pakistan always tries to send terrorists to bomb our country.” Given the demanding nature of his job, he requests that the government install machines and surveillance at the border to scan goods and people to prevent dangerous materials and people from crossing into Pakistan.



IX. IMPACT OF COVID-19 AT THE BORDER

The timing of fieldwork enabled ACSOR to study the border region in the midst of a major shock: the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting border closures and social and economic upheaval. While not all border community residents earn their living directly from the border, border closures still have a large disruptive effect on nearly everyone in the border communities.

COVID-19 comes on the heels of other shocks that the border region has experienced in recent years, including the construction of a fence by Pakistan along the border. Indeed, many respondents cited the barbed wire fence, rather than the coronavirus outbreak, as the main problem facing the people of the region:



P107, Teacher
Tanai, Khost

“The economic state of people in the area has gotten worse compared to the past now. People do not have access to economic and employment opportunities. Besides, prices of goods and food items have been increased. All these problems have been caused by construction of barbed wire fence and deployment of Pakistan army along the Durand line, but due to above-mentioned reasons, security situation also has gotten worse in the area and people are not able to meet their basic needs and requirements in food, potable water, clothing, shelter, education and healthcare.”

While there is a feeling that the region will likely eventually recover from the shock of the coronavirus outbreak, as this is just one more crisis in a region that has seen many, the fence is viewed as a permanent imposition with the potential to irrevocably alter the dynamics of border communities. Another respondent, this one from Gurbuz, expressed similar sentiments:

“When the way was open was for transit, the economic condition of the people had improved. All shops and hotels along the border were open and people’s works had improved. But since they closed it again people faced difficulties economically. The security situation is very satisfactory in this area and they call this place the place of peace and people come here for picnic. Before the installation of the fence people were socially in a great condition but since they installed the fence, it got worse, as I told you before.” [P77, 33 years old, male, 16 years of education, Teacher, Pashtun, Ministry of Education, Gurbuz, Khost]

Respondents in the focus groups expressed similar sentiments: participants in Gurbuz said that before the construction of the fence, the Durand Line had not felt like a real border, because people could still cross easily, but now that the fence has been built and restrictions have been



tightened, the border’s presence and impact on their lives is much more palpable. The participants perceive the fence and border closures as having had a severe impact on their community, but COVID-19 a smaller one, in that it was just one of many transitory shocks that the region has endured that will pass.

Policy	Description	Impact
Covid-19 Outbreak Restrictions	<p>Pakistan closed its border with Afghanistan on March 16. The Afghan government implemented a number of restrictions including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools were closed on March 21 and remained closed until September. There were some attempts to broadcast lessons on the radio, but with mixed success. • The Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs ordered restrictions on mosque attendance • Wedding Halls were closed • Shops, restaurants, and cafes in Kabul and other cities were closed during a five-week lockdown period in the spring. This extended to towns in the study sites. • The country's annual Nowruz (Persian New Year) celebration was not held • However, adherence to lockdowns was intermittent and haphazard in much of the country. 	<p>Border closure resulting in the suspension of cross border trade has reduced the employment and wage work opportunities available to locals in the border region. Border closure has devastating impacts on locals dependent on trade; the abrupt cancellation of trade has led to increase in prices in the area. Many border area locals were stranded in Pakistan at the time of border closure. When Torkham border was opened for pedestrian movement on 26 September, on a total of 6,956 stranded Afghans crossed into Afghanistan and 2,627 stranded Pakistanis crossed into Pakistan. The outbreak has also led to the closure of schools and other institutions. Students across Afghanistan are unable to attend school and parents with low levels of education are unable to teach their children at home.¹³</p>

¹³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2020. "Border Monitoring Update: COVID response." UNHCR Afghanistan, September, 2020. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCR%20Afghanistan%20-%20Border%20Monitoring%20Update%20-26Sep_FINAL.pdf.



IMPACT ON BORDER CROSSING

When the border is open and residents can cross, incomes are much better. The border opens and closes for various reasons, which in the past few years have included disputes between the Afghan and Pakistani governments, security crises, and the recent COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of field, between April and July 2020, the entire border was closed, which has had a negative impact on the area's local economy. Businessmen, traders, and wage workers do not have access to work or clientele as before. Many residents are unemployed due to the border's closure. No one could cross the border for any reason, including business, trade, or medical treatment.

"I agree with my brothers that inhabitants of the border region do not have access to roads. Besides, they do not have access to electricity, which is a requirement in our area because it is very hot during the summertime. Walls also must be constructed to protect the area from floods. Moreover, the gate must be open because we cannot take our patients to Pakistan for medical treatment. In addition, public land in the region is extorted by the former commanders and warlords. The government should pay due attention to all the above-mentioned problems and find an effective solution for them." [P3, Male, 55 Years Old, Pashtun/Mohmand, 12 Years, Mullah]

Accordingly, the most pressing change in Muhmand Dara is the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in the region. The pandemic has caused the closure of Torkham gate which in turn, immobilized the economic opportunities and business operations occurring near the border. While the 24/7 opening of Torkham gate was beneficial for locals in the area, the outbreak has left many unable to cross the border, leaving wageworkers without employment and shopkeepers without customers. Given that trade was not permitted during the lockdown, many respondents noted that there is widespread unemployment and limited access to resources.

As a result of the pandemic, people were quarantined at the border and at home, which made traveling anywhere more difficult.

"Before coronavirus, we could cross the border quickly, but now, people are quarantined at the border for many days or are not allowed to cross. People are very scared while crossing the border." [P80, 26 years old, Female, Uneducated, Housewife, Pashtun, Gurbuz, Khost]

IMPACT ON RESOURCE ACCESS AND ECONOMY

The pandemic severely disrupted the economic and social life of communities along the border, as it has for communities around the world. The impact in this region was particularly acute because Pakistan closed the border, which understandably affected people in the border region



more than those elsewhere in Afghanistan. Respondents also mentioned other impacts on their communities, such as enforced social distancing, inability to gather in groups, and school and business closures.

“Due to it, restrictions were imposed on movement. People did not come out of their homes, nor attended mosques.” [P27, 51 Years Old, Male, 16 Years of Education, Customs official, Pashtun, Customs Department, Mohmand Dara, Nangarhar]

For many, the inability to work or earn a living creates the risk of poverty and hunger.

“People are in very bad condition, even they don’t have bread and they are waiting to die.” [P105, 36 years old, Male, Illiterate, Local Shura Member, Pashtun, Tanai, Khost]

Inhabitants were cut off from services and economic opportunities in their own communities, could not go to Pakistan to access them either and were left to cope on their own as best they could.

BORDER RE-OPENING AFTER COVID-19 OUTBREAK

By the time the focus groups were fielded in mid-August (after the in-depth interviews), the two governments were making slow, incremental moves towards re-opening the border as the pandemic in the region waned. Focus group participants expected the re-opening to have a positive impact on the region.

“It is said that four gated such as Torkham, Spin Boldak, Ghulam Khan and Angor Ada will be open soon. However, it would be very good if our border becomes a transit and formal gate in which case a Consulate should be established therein.” [P7, Male, 33, Pashtun, 17 Years, Doctor, Dand Patan]

“Opening of the gate will have positive impacts on local economy. People will have jobs and labor works in the area and their economy will improve with the opening of the border. They will also stop using informal ways to cross the border into Pakistan.” [F1, FGD2, Female, 45 Years Old, Pashtun, 14 Years, Teacher, Torkham]

“When the border is re-open, residents will be able to resume business, trade, and other economic and social activities.” [P7, Male, 40, Pashtun/Mohmand, 16 Years, Head Of Village Affairs Department, Torkham]



However, by the time of the report writing in late September, only the Spin Boldak gate in Kandahar province had been confirmed to be fully reopened. Other gates were either open on a more limited basis or only to certain types of traffic.¹⁴

X. CONCLUSION

The remoteness, harsh geography, and poor security situation in the border region make the provision of essential services difficult, and this drives residents of the border region to seek access to those services on the Pakistani side of the border, especially in areas to which they may have cultural, family, or linguistic ties. The construction of the border fence, and specifically the fact that it blocks local residents from crossing to Pakistan to visit family and access essential services, was mentioned by many respondents, even though it was not explicitly asked about in either the IDI or FGD guides. Because the fence almost totally prevents informal crossing and informal trade across the border, which had previously been important ways for border region residents to adjust to shock and access services, this demarcation of the border is likely to have a more permanent, far-reaching impact than the COVID-19 pandemic.

The fence, if it remains in place, is likely to catalyze a permanent shift in the dynamics of the border region by making the border harder, less porous, and more difficult to traverse. A defining characteristic of the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan has long been unclear boundaries and frequent crossing by residents who share family, linguistic, and cultural ties to those on the other side. While the fence does not uproot these ties, it does impose a physical separation between them. The research found that, for better or worse, the fence has been effective at reducing both informal crossings and informal trade. Whether the placement of the fence will succeed in its objective of improving security and preventing the illicit movement of goods and people in the longer term remains to be seen.

When asked what people in the region needed most from the government, the most common answers involved essential services, particularly education and water resource management. All four districts suffer from poor service provision, and the research findings suggest that improving access to essential services, but particularly education, will have the largest positive impact for people living in the border region. This represents an important opportunity for investment from the development sector.

Lack of services on the Afghan side of the border is a key motivation for crossing the border into Pakistan, and if the issue of lack of essential services is addressed, the need for crossing the border, as well as the impact of shocks such as border closures and fence construction, will be lessened

¹⁴ *Border Monitoring Update: COVID-19 Response, 30 August – 05 September 2020. UNHCR Afghanistan.* <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCR%20Afghanistan%20-%20Border%20Monitoring%20Update%20-05SepFINAL.pdf>. Retrieved September 21, 2020.



considerably. The findings of the research strongly suggest that improving access to essential services in the border region will directly and noticeably better the lives of people in the border region, and also reduce incentives for them to cross into Pakistan to obtain services. This is especially important as the fence and requirement for visas makes services in Pakistan much more difficult, expensive, and time-consuming to access.

Other changes have also recently impacted the border region. The 24/7 opening of Torkham gate has improved the economic situation in Torkham and made crossings for a variety of purposes easier. However, it has so far appeared to have little impact on the other districts. Since the 24/7 opening was announced, the border has been subject to frequent closures, limiting its impact. However, the research suggests that most residents in the border region regard the 24/7 opening as a positive development, and that the potential for increased trade and shorter wait times will improve lives for people in Torkham and the surrounding region.

The border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan continues to be beset by severe challenges and vulnerable to shocks. However, the research finds that improving access to local services will improve the resiliency of local communities and their ability to adapt to future disruptions without having to cross the border into Pakistan to adapt, which is likely to become ever more challenging in the coming years due to increased restrictions.