



PRB
**Partners in
Revitalization and Building**

A Brief Note on the Situation of Cashmere Afghanistan



Photo: Khoshtood village, Khulm District Balkh

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Introduction

Afghanistan is an agricultural country where its population is directly or indirectly engaged in Agricultural and Livestock rearing for their family support and livelihood. Cashmere fiber in local language called Tibet and in central and western regions it is known as Kurk. Cashmere spinning was a traditional handcraft for those who were residents of borderline parts of Badakhshan. These farmers were busy in plait and sewing sweaters, coats, gloves, etc. As the demand for cashmere products and weaving handicraft marketing is improved, the farmers changed the meat-producing goats to cashmere-producing goats.

Afghanistan is the third-largest cashmere-producing country in the world after China and Magnolia, producing 1000 metric tons of cashmere annually. However, it is important to mention that animal husbandry especially cashmere has been not considered scientifically and technically as a valuable animal product in Afghanistan. Besides, the farmers have been not aware of the benefits of cashmere as an income source for their livelihood. The farmers often do not have the necessary technical knowledge and equipment for processing the cashmere including other animal products.

With the support of funding by Burberry foundation with technical support of Oxfam/Novib, Pur Projet, PRB (Partners in Revitalization and Building) implemented a series of activities at the field level. Capacity building of farmer, improving the breed, improvement of veterinary services, animal husbandry (goats' distribution for breeding), the establishment of Cashmere and other livestock production associations, and marketing of cashmere but still, there is a need for proper management, sheltering, production, breeding, and marketing capacity of the products. Therefore, due to the lack of the above capacity, the farmers cannot maintain the present capacity. To maintain the cashmere production capacity and make the farmers self-reliant, sustain the program, manage the pasture and alleviate hunger and poverty, PRB has the ability and expertise to train the farmers and link the farmers with the market. With the recent change, the activities effectively brought to a halt, and to continue, there is a need for refunding as requested by the farmers.

Background

Farmers generate 13-23 % of their income from livestock to maintain their livelihood. A cow for a rural family is the biggest supporter of their livelihood. Sheep and goats are traditionally kept to support families' consumption along with cattle, goats, providing the third part of livestock having their advantages over other animals of the flock. Goats have a small body and have the ability to adapt to different environments, as well as the milk and meat production of goats has the best quality than other animals. In Afghanistan goats produce 150 liters of milk during one lactation period but in some developed countries, every goat produces 700 liters during one lactation period. The size of an animal herd directly belongs to the economic capacity of a farmer. Thus 5 to 6 goats are kept with a cow to cover the routine family expenses. The goats can produce, easy for rearing, women, and children can manage easily their shelter, feeding, watering, milking and no need more professional equipment.

Research in 2008 indicates that only 30% of the produced cashmere is harvested every year and 70% of farmers are not aware of the value of cashmere. Whilst an extensive awareness and training program has taken place nationally, (ASAP from 2008 to 2010)¹, ongoing training and advice are required to incentivize harvesting and encourage superior production methods. As the 3rd largest producer of

¹ ACCELERATING SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE PROJECT (ASAP), funded by USAID



cashmere after China and Mongolia, Afghanistan has the potential to increase production by up to 200-300%. Historically, for years the cashmere industry in Afghanistan went undeveloped. Goats served as food; their hides were exported but their fiber was shorn and spun to be woven into carpets and tents for local and domestic use. There was no infrastructure in Afghanistan to clean and process the fiber for spinning commercially. But there were many goats, and some of the fiber was exported in its greasy form.

Afghanistan exports all of its cashmere in raw (greasy) form. With the establishment of a new processing plant in Tritex in Herat, it is estimated that approximately 30% of Afghan cashmere is now exported in processed form (de-haired, scoured, or hand-spun), and 70% in raw form. The opportunity for the sector is therefore to increase the volume of cashmere entering the processing system and to improve the quality of cashmere entering in domestic and export quality of markets to be more competitive internationally. Key commercial drivers are to improve the access to the market by strengthening herder-trainer, interactions, and export opportunities. Key production drivers are to increase the volume of harvested cashmere, to improve the quality of cashmere production, and to increase the volume of cashmere that undergoes processing.

At the amount of 20,000 Kg processed cashmere exported by Tritex to Italy in 2020 from which 10,000 kg was de-haired and 10,000 Kg was processed. The raw cashmere exported to China in 2020 was 287,445 Kg as reported by the Quarantine Department of the Provincial Agricultural Directorate of Herat. Raw cashmere exported to china was 387,445 Kg in 2021.

Due to the frequent occurrence of drought in Afghanistan, a large number of livestock adapted to the drought and most of the farmers were unable to properly obtain the agricultural products as well due to the drought. Goats are resistant to drought as well as to cold and moist weather. Therefore, the goats may not be easily affected by drought.

Cashmere Quality in Afghanistan

DIAMETER	Superior 13.0-15.5 micron	Grade I 15.51-16.8 micron	Grade II 16.81-17.6 micron	Grade III 17.61-19.0 micron
COLOUR				
White	34	31	29	22
Light Grey	34	31	29	22
Grey	33	31	28	21
Brown	33	30	28	21

On average Afghan cashmere is darker with a diameter of 16-17 microns which indicates the low quality compare to Mongolia and China.

In conclusion, the majority of Afghan traders mix the spring quality cashmere with the lower quality *skin*⁸ cashmere for creating an average quality to create an average product with an average price.



Brief information on PRB Cashmere Value Chain Production Project in Herat & Balkh:

PRB appreciates the funding of the project by Burberry and the technical support of Oxfam/Novib and Pur Projet. This project is designed to increase the society's income to overcome the problems of livelihood and reduce poverty to provide better communication between producers and the market for social and economic development. Through multi-stage approaches and different activities, were expected to improve the livelihoods of farmers, both men and women significantly to add more value to animal products especially cashmere. The project initially focused on three districts (Zenda Jan, Pashtun Zarghon Karukh) , in Herat province and two districts (Khulm, Charkent) in Balkh province. Project successful experience could extend to other provinces and stakeholders would be found for long-term funding.

Project beneficiaries

Cashmere value chain production project was committed to support and empower goat farmers and cashmere producers in the target three districts of Herat and two districts of Balkh, while the project has influenced the neighboring provinces such as Samangan, Baghlan, Takhar, Badakhshan, Farah, Badghis, and Ghor. The main beneficiaries were those who had cashmere goats of which 2,750 were in 59 villages of 2 districts of Balkh and 4,122 in 49 villages of 3 districts in Herat including 30% women in Balkh and 30% in Herat. To make the program sustainable, two cashmere and other livestock product Associations were established in Charkent and Khulm districts of Balkh and 3 districts (Zenda Jan, Pashtun Zarghon, and Karukh) in Herat. These associations were initially registered with the Ministry of Justice and



1Engaging local authority in project

the working permit has been approved provincial Justice department. Each association has board of directors, management team consisting of a president, vice-president cashier, and secretariate) and monitoring committee. Association has a general assembly that meets once a year. Basic objectives of the project:

The value chain cashmere production project of Afghanistan aims to empower the sustainable livelihood of the cashmere producing families that are busy rearing cashmere goats and production of cashmere, the project was implemented for increasing their income in the 2 districts of Charkent and Khulm and three districts of Herat (Karukh, Zenda Jan and Pashtun Zarghon). To achieve a strategic objective, the following has considered:

1. Strengthen the enabling environment for goat producers to harvest, process, and sell cashmere;
2. Improve the livestock management of goat producers for breeding, feeding, and animal health.
3. Organise goat producers in collective action organizations at the community level for market linkages and joined sales

The specific outputs at the end of the project:

1. Since the farmer did not know the value of cashmere, the price of cashmere was scanty on account of greasy form of and sold at a reduced price especially in the Khulm district of Balkh. Most of the farmers were using the goats for food purposes at homes or sold the goats to the market for meat, but after the start of the PRB project, the farmers understood the importance and value of cashmere, increased the number of goats because of the value of this commodity. This resulted in creating home-based jobs as income generation for both women and men.
2. Around seven thousand farmers trained in cashmere harvesting, cashmere value, and trade, gender parity in cashmere work, goat management, goats health, livestock wellbeing, pasture management for two consecutive years.



Herder training session in Herat



Female training session in Balkh



Photo- 2 Training session for herders in Khulm District



Practical training of females in cashmere harvesting

3. Although privatized veterinary clinics were available at the district level the farmers and the veterinarian at the clinic did not have proper linkages or was too loose. PRB has strengthened this linkage through a participatory approach, trained both the women and men farmers and veterinarians for how to interact with each other and transfer the knowledge to other livestock owners. As a result of strong linkage established through vaccination, treatment, and deworming on time, the animal health status improved, mortality and morbidity reduced and the quantity and quality of cashmere and other animal products have been increased and improved. Solar fridges for keeping the quality of vaccine and a motorcycle for easy access to the farmers supplied to clinic



strengthen veterinary service for herder in Khulm, Balkh

4. The Shearing of goats for the collection of cashmere was non-technical and non-hygienic which might cause the sickness of the animals and spread many infectious diseases to humans. PRB trained the farmers and veterinarians that how to shear the goats with the use of technical equipment. At the end of the training, the required equipment was distributed to farmers. Shearing with technical equipment in consideration of hygienic conditions resulted in the prevention of diseases and collection of more cashmere, meanwhile increasing the quantity and improving the quality of cashmere.



-Collecting cashmere from herders

5. Although women in Afghanistan normally used to feed, clean, collect and process animal products they did not have the experience, how to collect and process cashmere. however, they learned how to harvest, de-hair, sort, pack commodities in a technical sound way as a result of training provide by PRB professional team

6. Traditionally herders construct stables and shelters without having sufficient air ventilation, light, a place for drinking water, and feeding troughs with increased rate livestock of mortality. PRB remodeled and rehabilitated sample stable to inspire and encourage the farmer to fellow. The initiative resulted in significant improvement in livestock wellbeing and a decrease in animal disease cases

7. To improve the processing and marketing of the cashmere in an organized way, PRB established five cashmere and other livestock products associations in Balkh and Herat. By the end of the project, these associations start to become sustainable through the admission and membership fees.
8. The breed of the goats was not improved with little yield, PRB organized distributed 70 female and 80 male goats (bucks) in Balkh and 223 Female and 113 males in Herat to those farmers who were raising cashmere goats. The experience for improving the breed was transferred to other farmers as well.
9. Technical working group meeting conducted as per plan to address challenges and discuss developing cashmere policy advocating with stakeholder to engage in policymaking at government level
10. establishment of dozens of pasture committees in target districts and training the member of these was a constructive activity for pasture sustainability
11. To keep the animals healthy and prevent them from infectious diseases, PRB conducted 4 times vaccination and deworming campaign within 4 years. Farmers were used to continuing to do vaccination and deworming every year after they realized the measured decreased livestock mortality rate.
12. Traditionally farmers used old-type scissors called Do-Carda for collection and processing, which were causing the loss of product. PRB introduced spinning combs to the beneficiaries for improvement of the cashmere collection & harvesting. At the same time personal protection equipment such as gloves and face masks distributed to beneficiaries to inspire a sense of awareness about their health and safety
13. PRB also conducts a spot awareness campaign to project beneficiaries alongside cashmere radio drama and PSA as per the project plan through mass media to overcome FM radio signal challenges in mountainous terrain
14. In the stretch of project implement two rounds of harvested cashmere collected 2 times during the period of the project.
15. In consultation with the cashmere association, one hundred stop shops were established for the cashmere producer group close to their living area. These stalls first collect the product from the



General Assembly for selection of CAO's management team

farmer and then sell it to the company through the association. This made the farmer's position to set a better rate for their communities. With two years the price increase double even triple by end of 2021.

16. In the wake of severe drought PRB team also distribute Concentrate feed & straw during winter in Khulm and Charkent in Balkh to keep alive goats for most vulnerable families



Distribution of livestock feeding to the vulnerable farmer during 2019 drought



Coordination with the local authority in the distribution

17. To develop a cashmere policy and standardize the procedure of cashmere collection, meetings were held between different stakeholders including government departments and the Ministries.



Advocacy meeting for cashmere policy with MAIL

Homebased Cashmere Products and potential production of cashmere in Afghanistan

The women farmers who were rearing cashmere goats used the cashmere fibers for weaving expensive textiles cloths such as coatdresses, handkerchiefs, blankets, women veils, shawls, caps, jackets.... etc.

Cashmere goats are less available in the northern provinces due to the lack of improved breeds of cashmere goats, in Afghanistan domestic Cashmere goats can be found in the south of Herat and Badghis, North-East of Nooristan and Badakhshan.

80-90% of goats produce cashmere in Afghanistan and the seasons of cashmere collection are spring and autumn. Mating also can be carried out during Spring and autumn, in addition to the milk, meat, skin which are the primary products, cashmere is the secondary product in Afghanistan.

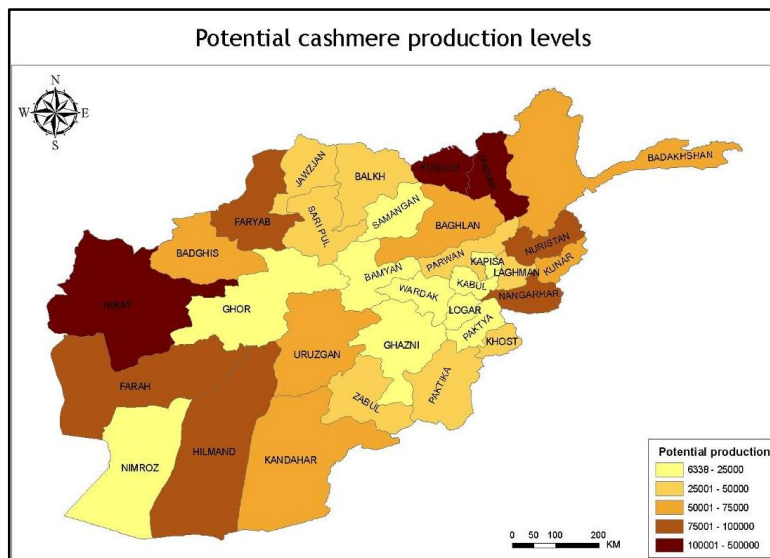
However, if awareness, training, and equipment for collection with linking to the market being focused, Afghanistan has the potential for increasing the cashmere production and the income of the farmers up to USD 50 per month.

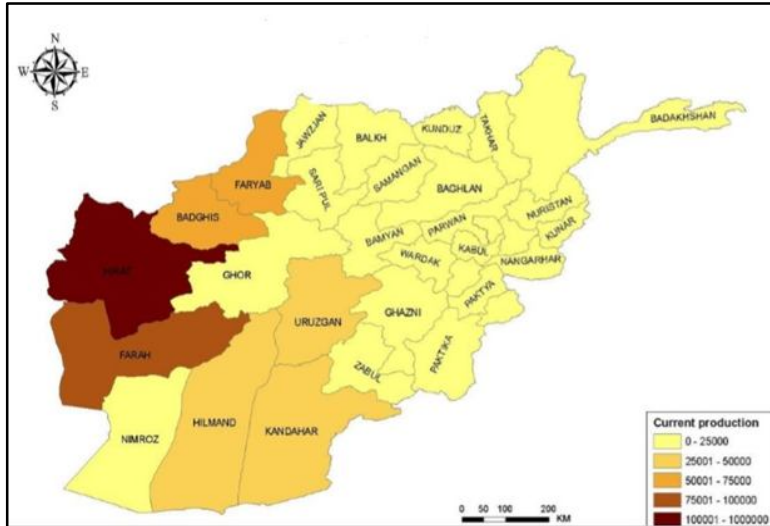


Goat harvesting and de-hairing by women

Potential of Cashmere Production in Afghanistan

Cashmere production mainly takes place in the western region. Herat is the main hub for the production, process, and export of cashmere. Nevertheless, the northern region has significant potential for cashmere production it is undeveloped. The following map, developed by the United States Agency for International Development (AID) project in recent years, shows the current level of cashmere production:





Problems of Cashmere Production during the time of the Project:

Cashmere goats are available in Herat, Badghis, Ghor, Hazarajat, Helmand, and Badakhshan provinces in Afghanistan. The main problems in Cashmere production are as follows:

- Farmers do not have sufficient knowledge for the collection of cashmere.
- Lack of sufficient equipment for the collection of cashmere.
- Lack of hygiene during the processing of cashmere by farmers.
- Availability of hair and animal waste /manure in cashmere due to the carelessness of farmers/collectors.
- possibility of zoonotic and infectious diseases in cashmere fiber and its transmission to animals and humans.
- Instability of Cashmere market due to the lack of coordination between government, private sector, and stakeholders.
- Lack of sufficient support of government for Cashmere traders and its processing for the production of expensive and high-quality textiles.
- Traditional possessing of cashmere due to the unavailability of machinery for production and processing.
- Local farmers especially women do not have equipment for weaving handicrafts.
- Complicated procedure of Government custom with zero taxation.
- Lack of paying attention to breeding for improving the quality and quantity Insufficient awareness, training to the farmers due to the insufficient fund.
- Lack of insufficient experts or trainers
- Strengthening the establishment of more Cashmere and other livestock production associations for better coordination, marketing, and sustainability.

Recommendations:

- Preparing a procedure for proper collecting and processing of cashmere
- Preparing a strategy for cashmere collection, processing, and marketing and Preparing formal cashmere policy
- improvement of the breed of cashmere goats through natural or artificial insemination.
- Paying attention to the processing of cashmere inside Afghanistan and the creation of marketing opportunities outside the country.
- Involvement of the General Directorate of Animal Health and Livestock Production, Research, the chamber of Comers', The ANSA, NGOs who were involved in Cashmere projects, and the donors for funding.
- Establishing a committee for follow up, Monitoring and Evaluation
- Expanding the training to other provinces and farmers
- Continue expanding the awareness to the farmers
- Establishment of more cashmere farmer association
- Conducting workshops and arranging visits to cashmere production and processing countries.
- Conducting pasture management training
- Establish linkages with national and international markets for cashmere business.
- Expansion of stable/shelter improvement
- Strengthening of veterinary services.
- Employment of national and international qualified experts
- Distribute proper equipment or encourage the farmer or farmer's association to invest in cashmere to import or establish a small factory inside Afghanistan.
- Cashmere collecting training.

Current cashmere value chain status of cashmere producer group in Herat and Balkh pinpointed by the yellow line

Cashmere Processing Chart

