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SOUTH ASIA REGIONAL INITIATIVE FOR ENERGY
COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT
REVIEW MEETING -
BUILDING CAPACITY: ENGLISH LANGUAGE
INSTRUCTION MEW'S VOCATIONAL
TRAINING CENTER

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Afghanistan's Ministry of Energy and Water (MEW) is struggling to improve the reliability and availability of its electricity infrastructure. These efforts are exacerbated by a lack of skill sets needed for routine operations and maintenance.

The Vocational Training Center (VTC) is the primary instructional resource for MEW serving two purposes: 1) technical high school; and, 2) professional development courses for MEW staff.

As part of a multiple pronged effort, USAID/Afghanistan, USAID/SARI/E, and the MEW are collaborating to rebuild the instructional capacity of the VTC. Within this effort and in preparation for additional technical assistance, English language instruction was provided for the 60 instructors and management of the VTC. In developing this effort, language comprehension was assessed, objectives were established, course content was developed, course materials were selected, the language teachers (Afghans that teach English for a living) were interviewed and selected, and the VTC instructors and staff were placed, according to their current competency in the language, in one of three courses: basic, intermediate, and conversational. The three courses met six days a week, two hours per day from December 2005 through March 2006 and totaled four hundred and thirty-eight instructional hours.

Results of this instruction include: **90% attendance; 97% passed proficiency examinations (59% had exceptional scores); and, 93% highly recommended the course.**



Concluding Session – Awards Ceremony



Awards Ceremony

Afghanistan, a nation ravaged by over 20 years of conflict and natural disasters, was faced with immediate needs when the rule of the Taliban ended. The electricity sector of Afghanistan is one of the most underdeveloped sectors in the nation. Consequently, the international community's response was targeted at restoration and increasing the physical infrastructure. The need to protect these investments and to begin the process of nation building is emerging into a more comprehensive assistance approach that realizes the need to develop human capacity within Afghanistan.

As the national utility struggles to improve the reliability of existing electrical capacity, these efforts are exacerbated by a lack of skill sets needed for routine operations and maintenance.

The MEW contained a training center aimed at vocational education for high school students (grades 10 –14) and professional development courses for MEW staff. The VTC structure contained dormitories for residential students, laboratories for practical instruction, classrooms, and a library. The VTC is and was accredited by the Ministries of Education and Higher Education. The majority of graduates from the VTC are employed by the national electric utility, DABM, providing a critical stream of personnel to perform a variety of technical functions – assistant engineers, linesmen, draftsmen, carpenters, welders, and electricians.

The VTC was located in an area of Kabul that experienced heavy damage from past conflicts and was destroyed. Today, the VTC is operating under makeshift conditions without any laboratories and limited instructional materials. Government funding is primarily for hosting students from the provinces and salaries for staff.

Approximately 300 students (5 are young women) are currently enrolled and equally split between day and night offerings. There are about 50 instructors who average 20 years of experience (8 women).

Following a detailed assessment and data collection effort, USAID and MEW agreed upon a multi-pronged effort to rebuild the instructional capacity of the VTC. The objectives are:

- To provide the basis for a modern and efficient vocational educational center to train young men and women for positions as operators and technicians within the electricity sector
- To improve the effectiveness of course content and instruction
- To determine the optimum organizational structure for the VTC
- To identify sustainable models for the VTC

The English training is viewed as an initial effort to help prepare VTC staff to meet these objectives.

This effort is to provide a suitable level of English language training to the instructors and management of the VTC, commensurate with their current competency. Increasing their understanding of this language would also assist their communication for the planned and upcoming technical assistance from specialists whom are unlikely to speak Dari or Pashtu. Moreover, the training would be targeted to obtain measurable results.



Basic Course Participants

Once agreement was reached with the MEW and VTC to conduct this training, the following activities were performed in preparation of the classes:

- Personnel were evaluated to determine level of understanding
- Instructors were selected
- Course levels were determined
- Course objectives and content were prepared
- Instruction

3.1 PERSONNEL EVALUATION

Each VTC staff was given an oral and written examination to determine their level of understanding of the English language.

3.2 SELECTION OF INSTRUCTORS

Beginning with the initial criteria that the instructors of the course should be Afghans and must be regularly involved in teaching the English language to Afghans, several candidates were interviewed to determine their competency in content and methodology and their interpersonal skills. Three instructors were selected.

3.3 COURSE LEVELS

Given the number of participants (50) and levels of competency, three separate classes were determined to be the most effective approach. The levels were basic, intermediate, and conversational.

3.4 COURSE OBJECTIVES AND CONTENT

The objective of the courses was to increase the participants' level of verbal and written comprehension of the English language, emphasizing technological terms.

Participants in the basic level are expected to master the following:

- Fundamental and primary grammar
- Weeks and months

- Sentence structure and word choices
- Read and write sentences
- Use of self-teaching aids

Participants in the intermediate level are expected to master the following:

- Raise and answer questions
- Grammar, pronunciation, context
- Increase vocabulary and understanding of various topics-music, business, sport, technology
- Interviewing techniques and teaching sessions
- Translate English to Dari, emphasizing technological information

Participants in the conversational level are expected to master the following:

- Converse and speak in English, emphasizing technological information
- Translate lesson materials from English to Dari
- Translate technology books from English to Dari
- Contemporary technology, emphasizing energy
- Converse in English, emphasizing day-day activities and teaching subjects

Course content and teaching plans were developed to meet the overall objective and expected results for each course. Appropriate course materials were also selected.

3.5 INSTRUCTION

The classes met six days/week, two hours/day from December through March and totaled four hundred and thirty-eight instructional hours. Attendance was taken each day. Homework, class participation, attendance, and exams formed the basis for grading. Participants were paid \$1/day to partially offset transportation costs – courses were conducted during the VTC's winter break. Classes were regularly monitored by Nexant to ensure all aspects of the courses were being met.



Intermediate Course Participants

Results of this instruction are: **90% attendance; 96% passed proficiency examinations (50% had exceptional scores); and, 93% highly recommended the course.**

Specific results for each class are:

1. Basic course

- A. Number of trainees (32)
- B. Number of high level graduated trainees > 90% (11)
- C. Number of good level graduated trainees >80% (12)
- D. Number of fair level graduated trainees >70% (8)

The participants now are able to understand the fundamentals of English language, grammar, and to use simple words in sentences.

These students would benefit from additional English training at the intermediate level.

2. Intermediate course

- A. Number of trainees (13)
- B. Number of high level graduated trainees >90% (4)
- C. Number of good level graduated trainees >80% (7)
- D. Number of fair level graduated trainees >70% (2)

The participants now are able to speak and read English at a moderate level and to prepare teaching materials from English to Dari.

3. Conversational course

- A. Number of trainees (15)
- B. Number of high level graduated trainees >90% (10)
- C. Number of good level graduated trainees >80% (4)
- D. Number of fair level graduated trainees >70% (-)

The participants now have the ability to translate teaching materials, they are able to have a relatively fluent conversation in English, and they are able to add more information from various resources in order to prepare effective teaching materials and, if needed, can function as English language instructors.

The courses were concluded in March with a small ceremony attended by the Deputy Minister of MEW and officials from the national electricity utility, DABM. Certificates of achievement were provided and those participants that scored greater than 90% were given additional recognition.

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