



“E-Services through Post Offices in Afghanistan”

**A development cooperation project of
Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,
Government of India,
International Telecommunication Union
and Universal Postal Union**

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Provision of E-Services using Post Offices in Afghanistan

The project:

International Telecommunications Union (ITU), Universal Postal Union (UPU), Government of India and Government of Afghanistan have initiated a project to modernize post offices in 11 provincial towns.¹ The project aims to set up Multipurpose Community Telecentres (MCTs) in post offices to provide a variety of services – community access to ICTs, epost, email, money transfer and salary payments. The project is designed to take advantage of the synergies offered by a number of ongoing projects, such as the Government of India's Emergency Restoration of Telecommunications in 11 cities and the World Bank's Government Communication Network. Connectivity for the project comes from the World Bank funded Government Communication Network.

By focusing on dissemination of government information and community access, the project assists in the process of improved access to government and in strengthening government's capacity to deliver services in provincial towns. This project is an integral part of the international efforts towards the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Execution of the project:

The project document was signed by all the partners in 2007. This was preceded by the organization of two intensive training programmes for the staff of the post offices. India supplied and installed IT equipment, set up LAN and diesel generators at each of the 11 provincial capital, MOC central post office at Kabul and at Kabul hub station.² The telecentres were connected and integrated with the Government Communication Network's VSAT system. The project was implemented on behalf of Government of India by the Telecommunications Consultants India Limited (TCIL). TCIL also provided operational training to 15 officials of Afghanistan Post for a period of one week. India completed its commitments in August 2007.

Afghanistan Government provided physical space, power supply, bandwidth on GCN, leased line connectivity between the post office and the VSAT hub and the logistical support. Afghan Government was also responsible for the security of the equipment and personnel deployed in Afghanistan. This was completed by the end of 2007.

The Universal Postal Union provided expertise, software and hardware as well as training in software for the introduction of money transfer service. UPU supported the installation IFS Light which allows Afghan Post to exchange international electronic money transfer.

International Telecommunication Union provided for several rounds of extensive training programme for the Afghan personnel involved in the project.

Present status of the project:

Project has been implemented in all the locations, except Farah, where due to security considerations installation was deferred and Afghanistan MOC has offered to install the equipment at a later date. Eight of the 12 centers are networked and connected to the Government Communication Network. At three locations (Zabul, Paktika, Nimruz) GCN is not operational and the telecentres therefore do not have connectivity.

¹ These towns are Kabul, Bamyaan, Farah, Meymaneh, Gardez, Charikar, Qaleh-ye-Now, Mehtar Lam, Asadabad, Zarani, Zareh Sharan and Qalat. In addition the project also modernized the post office at Kabul. Equipment has been installed by India at post offices in all provincial towns except Farah.

² The equipment includes servers, PCs, epost terminal, printers, routers, LAN hub, modems, UPS, and diesel generator, wooden partitions of approximately 3m X 2m to separate the individual cubicles for the 3 PCs and the e-post terminal

Outcome of the project:

The Multipurpose Community Telecenters at these locations are being used for providing training, salary payments to the families of defense personnel, MIS, printing, email and scanning. These are particularly popular with small businesses that use the facilities for scanning their documents and emailing them. E-post has become very popular particularly when there have been disruptions in road communications. Messages are scanned, emailed, printed by the recipient post master, printed and delivered.

Afghan Post has introduced international EMS to 15 countries and the business is growing. In addition, IPS light has become operational and is being used for tracking and tracing of international EMS and parcels. UPU has provided remote assistance from PTC, Berne to install IFS light in Afghanistan in April 2008. UPU will be providing expert services for the introduction of domestic money order service in Afghanistan.

Afghan Post has requested extension of warranty period on the equipment and is contemplating an annual maintenance contract in order to ensure trouble free operation. In a meeting in June 2008, India agreed to send an engineer for checking configuration of the IT equipment and connectivity between the post offices and the GCN node.

Future expansion

In a short span of its existence and in the circumstances, the project has made its presence felt in the towns where it is functioning. Afghanistan has shown keen interest to expand the project to a further 22 locations (in addition to the 12 locations where the project has already been implemented.) The new locations include the five major cities (Herat, Kandahar, Jalalabad, Mazar-e-Sherif and Kunduz) and 17 tier 2 towns (a total of 34). The value of the project will be enhanced by expanding the coverage of the project to five major cities and 17 towns, thus covering major population and political centres. This will contribute to the sustainability of the project as greater number of people will be using the system.

Afghan Post is keen to offer additional services at these locations. These include counter automation (including back offices functions such as compilation of data), track and trace of domestic mail, electronic money order, salary payments and e-post. This expansion is assigned a high priority and Afghanistan Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MICT) has already included the above in their national plan.



Participants at the Training Programme organized in Kabul in December 2007.