

Quarterly Project Report

Rebuilding the Information Infrastructure in Afghanistan: A Plan to Begin Redevelopment of the Kabul University Library

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**Arid Lands Information Center
Office of Arid Lands Studies
University of Arizona**

Overall Project Goals:

The goal is to take a first step toward developing a modern agricultural information system in Afghanistan. This will be accomplished by creating a fully equipped and operational Agriculture Electronic Library housed in Kabul University's College of Agriculture.

Accomplishments to Date:

During the past quarter and with funding from the IALC/USAID, Atifa Rawan (University of Arizona Librarian), with support from Carla Casler and Barbara Hutchinson (University of Arizona, Arid Lands Information Center, began the first phase of an intensive effort to rebuild the agricultural information system in Afghanistan. This involved the installation of an Agriculture Electronic Library for the College of Agriculture at Kabul University. Specifically, in May 2004, preparations were made for Atifa Rawan's June trip to Kabul and for the purchase of necessary support resources. The following electronic resources were identified, purchased, and shipped directly to the Ministry of Higher Education in Afghanistan via express mail prior to my arrival in Kabul:

- TEEAL (The Essential Electronic Agricultural Library) 1993-2005 – includes 3 towers of the full-text CD-ROM collection of 140 major journals in agriculture. TEEAL is produced through a cooperative effort between the Rockefeller Foundation, Cornell University's Albert R. Mann Library, and leading science publishers.
- CAB International CD-ROM full-text products: Crop Protection Compendium, Animal Health and Production Compendium, Forestry Compendium

In addition, registration for free access to the Access to Global Online Research in Agriculture (AGORA) system was accomplished. This web resource provides full-text for over 400 journals from major scientific publishers in the fields of food, agriculture, environmental science and related social sciences.

Armed with \$10,000 in cash, on her arrival in Kabul on June 17th, Ms. Rawan immediately began laying the groundwork for setting up the Agriculture Electronic Library. She met with Dr. Fayeze, the Minister of Higher Education, Prof. Akbar Popal, President of Kabul University, Prof. Mohammad Yasin Mohsini, Dean Faculty of Agriculture and Dr. Wassimi (ICARDA representative in Kabul) and explained the goals and objectives of the project. They had all been contacted previously about the purpose of the project, specifically in regard to the best delivery

address for TEEAL. As a result, the CD-ROM boxes had already arrived and had been placed in the Office of the Dean of College of Agriculture.

Ms. Rawan was shown their existing library facility. The room was approximately 35x30 feet. There was a very small storage closet on the side of the room. There were about 10 bookcases that contained only a few current textbooks. The remainder was outdated and dusty books and journals. The facility had three large tables with broken chairs for students to use. Rusty shelving lined one wall where an untrained worker sat supervising use of the library. The room was dark and gloomy, and in need of major repairs. In spite of this, there were students using the room for study.

After seeing the room, Ms. Rawan began immediately working with College of Agriculture staff to refurbish and equip the Library. This included shopping for computers, bookcases, curtains, and painting supplies. A painter was hired and a tailor was brought in to make curtains for the windows. Then the room was emptied of all furniture by the College foreman and approximately 20 college employees and students so that painting could begin. This was followed by the hanging of the curtains and laying of new carpet. Once the shelving and new furniture were put in place, selected current agriculture books, obtained from the Asia Foundation Office in Kabul, were added to the collection.

After only two weeks, it was possible to have an official opening of the Library, including a ribbon-cutting ceremony. Attending were Dr. Fayeze, Minister of Higher Education, Dr. Roy Glover of the US Embassy, Deans of Kabul University Colleges, and other university officials. A reception followed. Dr. Fayeze stated in his opening remarks, that this was the “first electronic library in Afghanistan” and he went on to say that this day, June 25, 2004, will be a great day in the history of higher education in Afghanistan and will be remembered by many people.

In preparation for the opening, the following equipment and supplies were purchased:

1. Four computers, two printers and cables, network cards
2. Painting supplies
3. Carpeting
4. Six bookcases and two computer desks
5. Window Curtains
6. Two Internet cards

Activities Underway for July – September:

In July, Mr. Khalid Madadi, a college instructor, was appointed by the Dean of College as a part-time (4-5 hours a day) Field Coordinator to monitor the Library and provide assistance to faculty, students, and researchers in using the electronic resources. Mr. Madadi had recently returned from an agricultural training course provided by the University of Illinois faculty in Pakistan. He can be reached at this email address abdulkhalid_m@yahoo.com. His phone number in Kabul is 93-70297337.

The following additional furniture and supplies were also purchased in July for the facility:

1. Upgraded four monitors from 15 “to 17” and purchased covers
2. Two computer desks
3. Four chairs
4. Vacuum cleaner
5. Shelf for CDs

Currently, the Field Coordinator is working to familiarize himself with TEEAL and other electronic library resources. He is also communicating with the University of Arizona team by email and keeping records of his daily activities and usage. Several students may be hired shortly to assist Mr. Madadi in this facility.

A preliminary concept paper for rebuilding the agricultural information system throughout the Afghan higher education system was prepared and sent in July to the Dr. Glover at the US Embassy in Kabul and to Dr. Merkel, USAID/Kabul agriculture advisor. Once feedback has been received, plans are to compile a full proposal for initiating an expanded effort. This effort will involve multiple institutions including the University of Illinois and Texas A & M as well at the University of Arizona.

Background Information on the College of Agriculture, Kabul University

The College of Agriculture was established in 1956 and is located in the main campus at Kabul University. Currently, the College has 850 students enrolled in the four-year program. There are only 25 female students enrolled. The College has 40 teaching faculty (only 1 female) and an additional 25 staff members. This semester, there are 35 faculty at the College and 5 others are enrolled in training abroad. The previous Library was equipped only with outdated materials and no current periodicals. Major courses offered in the College include: agronomy, animal science, plant protection, forestry and natural resources, horticulture and soil science, and irrigation.