

Quarterly Report

October 1 –December 31, 2007

For

**Sustainable Development of Dry Lands in Asia and the Middle East
Funded by USAID in cooperation with the**

**International Arid Lands Consortium
Office of Arid Land Studies
College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
University of Arizona
Tucson, Arizona**

By

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Project Overview

Afghanistan:

With the strong continuous support of USAID and IALC Dryland Project TAC members the ongoing efforts toward the revitalization of the agricultural education program in higher education institutions in Afghanistan has achieved significant progress through the establishment of two Agriculture Electronic Libraries (AEL) in the Faculties of Agriculture at Kabul and Nangarhar Universities in 2004 and 2006 respectively. The foundation of distant teaching and learning has been established and in due time it could be expanded to link major US universities with these institutions for the advancement of science based education systems in Afghanistan. The extension of these facilities to other colleges of agriculture will strengthen the higher education institutions in Afghanistan. A well-educated youth can serve the country and contribute to peace and security in the region.

Yemen:

The agricultural education and information system in Yemen requires similar attention. However the security and infrastructure situation of Yemen compared to Afghanistan is much better. The Yemeni universities have expressed interest in AEL. The USAID mission in Yemen has been very supportive of the initiatives to extend the agricultural electronic library and distant learning technology into their universities.

Project Name: Establishment of Teaching and Learning Technology Center for Nangarhar University, Faculty of Agriculture, Jalalabad, Nangarhar, Afghanistan.

Overall Project Goals:

Afghanistan:

The objective was to establish an information resource center for the development of modern agriculture in Eastern Afghanistan. This was accomplished by creating a fully equipped and operational Agriculture Electronic Library and technology teaching and learning center at Nangarhar University in Jalalabad, Afghanistan. The center is housed and managed by the faculty of Agriculture.

Yemen:

The goal is to open a teaching and learning technology center in two Colleges of Agriculture (Aden & Ibb) in Yemeni universities in 2008 to support faculty and students learning and teaching activities. We (NMSU and U of A) have established contact with these universities and are working on sorting the details out for project implementation.

Current quarter (October 1- December 31, 2007)

Afghanistan:

The higher education system in Afghanistan is in need of continued support to train young Afghans and the farming community in market oriented agricultural production. The IALC Sustainable Development of Drylands in Asia and the Middle East has focused on extension and education in the agricultural sector in Afghanistan. The attention to this important sector will help more than 85% of the Afghan population who are directly involved in agriculture and the whole population that need food and food assistance from the international community.

Observations:

Another major concern is the lack of communication networking throughout the university. The computer facility still lacks internet capabilities, inhibiting university staff access to online databases (AGORA, HENARI), e-mails, etc.

Currently the faculty does not have a library, and there are no resources of any kind (primary, secondary or tertiary) available at this time. The students rely completely on verbal dictation and notes provided by faculty members. There is no way for determining the validity of information or possibilities for updating educational levels. Lack of such vital resources inhibits free thinking capabilities, spirit of investigation, and experimental studies. What we have achieved in a short period with a modest budget is very efficient and effective, but needs to be further expanded and provided with the necessary support for continuity.

Achievements:

Afghanistan:

1. The training of faculty members in the college of agriculture has continued throughout this quarter.
2. Two hundred ten students have also been trained in the use of TEEAL up to the end of 2007.
3. Contacted the president of Nangarhar University and discussed with him the sustainability of the center the other resources for distant learning nodes.
4. Communicated with the dean of college of agriculture in Nangarhar University to get letter of support for our efforts to find funding for the expansion of the center.
5. Arranged for the continuous maintenance of the center through personal contacts.
6. With assistance from the project director, wrote one concept proposal for the establishment of Agricultural Electronic Library (AEL) in six colleges of agriculture in Afghanistan as a part of a proposal, "Afghanistan Water, Agriculture and Technology Transfer (AWATT)" that Texas A & M presented to USAID on September 4th this year. A second proposal was submitted to CREES/USDA/ISE for the upgrade of the current facility.

7. Contacted colleagues to advance fund for the maintenance of operation in the center. The advance has been given to the dean of college of agriculture and it has been used for the salary support of the coordinator and security guard.
8. During the meeting in Washington D.C. the USAID team, the TAC board, and the IALC members were supportive of the project. It was suggested that the use of solar panels for electricity generation be investigated in order to overcome the dependency upon unreliable electric power. This option was investigated, but due to budgetary limitation no action was taken.

Training:

Afghanistan

Training is continuing by AEL coordinator in the college of agriculture in Nangarhar University and 125 students were trained in October and November 2007.



Figure 1. Students of the college of agriculture in Nangarhar University in training to use TEEAL made available through the initial work at the Technology Training and Learning Center late in 2007.



Figure 2. Another group of students of the college of agriculture in Nangarhar University in training to use TEEAL made available through the initial work at the Technology Training and Learning Center late in 2007.

Yemen:

1. Prepared, concept note, budget and scope of work for the extension of this activities to two universities in Yemen.
2. Continued efforts to contact the authorities in Aden and Ibb universities for the establishment of AEL. Finally we heard from Ibb through Dr. Jim Libbin that they have identified Dr. Alhakimi Mokhtar as the contact person. Contact was established with the dean of college of agriculture at Aden University, Professor Abas Bawazir in the latter part of October 2007.
3. Arranged for the trip to Yemen with Dr. Jim Libbin of NMSU but due to security concerns in Afghanistan and no response from Yemen, it did not take place.
4. U of A and NMSU are in regular contact with Yemen to prepare for the establishment of AEL centers in two universities.

Following quarter: (January 1-March 30, 2008)

Recommendations:

These suggestions holds true for the sustainability and continued upgrade of this initiative in both Afghanistan and Yemen.

1. Work with the faculty and administration to find funds for the rehabilitation of the teaching facilities and faculty offices.
2. Look for potential donors for the expansion of this center.
3. Work with other organizations to facilitate the internet in order to enable the faculty and students to access online information.
4. Gather data and information on distance learning and its application in the developing countries.
5. Arrange for trip to Yemen and Afghanistan taking into account the security situation in both countries.