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USACE trains Afghans to operate and maintain facilities

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – Successfully transitioning operations and maintenance responsibilities to the Afghan National Army’s Directorate of Public Works is the underlying reason for a new training program designed to teach Afghans the fundamentals of building O&M.

“We’ve got to ensure that the Afghan National Security Forces have all the tools necessary to carry on their mission after the transition in 2014 is complete, and coalition forces leave Afghanistan” said Albert Soliz, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Afghanistan Engineer District-South’s chief of operations and maintenance.

This training program is the result of collaboration between the Afghan National Army, the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan’s Infrastructure, Training and Advisory Group, USACE and ITT Exelis, the prime contractor that is conducting the training and performing the O&M support.

“The ANA’s current O&M system will also benefit from the training program because every level – from requisition of materials to purchasing and quality assurance – will be tested,” said Christine Florea, an architect heading the South District’s O&M transition project. “This is a complex program and the challenges are significant. Remote geographic locations, student recruiting, wage scales, literacy and time constraints have all affected the way we developed the training program and how it is implemented,” Florea said.

USACE manages and oversees the overarching O&M contract, which is funded by CSTC-A, and began this latest training portion of the contract Jan. 7. The initial training will accommodate over 120 students and will run for approximately eight months at Kandahar Airfield in Kandahar province, FOB Apache/Camp Eagle in Zabul province, Camp Shorabak in Helmand province, and Camp Zafar in Herat province, and Qal-e-Now, in Badghis province.

Similar training programs at Camp Hero in Kandahar province and Shindand in Herat province will begin in February and March, respectively.

Students attending the training are Afghan civilians hired by the local ANA DPW and come with diverse skill sets. “Some are skilled technicians, but most are entry-level trainees with very little technical knowledge,” Soliz continued. “This program will teach them the fundamentals in critical skilled trades, including electrical, plumbing, heating and cooling, power generation, carpentry, as well as facilities management.”



An Afghan instructor lectures new operations and maintenance students during the first week of training at the Afghan Air Force's 205th Atal Corps Air Wing on Kandahar Airfield. (USACE Photo)

In addition to O&M fundamentals, trainees will receive site-specific and building-specific training depending on the location where the student will ultimately work. For instance, if a student will work where buildings are constructed with traditional concrete masonry techniques, their training will include masonry-repair and maintenance methodologies.

CSTC-A and ITAG selected and prioritized the training sites. ITAG also provides direct mentoring support to the DPW commanders. According to Florea, weekly planning and coordination meetings and frequent communication between all members of the team is critical to ensuring the program's success.

“At the local level, ITAG team members meet with ANA commanders daily to overcome process and logistics hurdles,” said Florea. Obtaining materials and managing cash flow are of primary importance. “We have a lot to accomplish before the transition is complete in 2014, and this O&M training will help equip the ANA with critical skills that will keep their facilities operational long after coalition forces are gone.”

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