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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Partnership for Quality Control and Mentorship

By MSG Mark W. Rodgers
Afghanistan Engineer District

Kabul, Afghanistan – A ceremony held here recently heralded the accomplishments of Quality Assurance Representatives (QAR) working for the United States Agency of International Development (USAID) and in partnership with the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).

As a part of USAID's program to improve the condition of existing schools and clinics in Afghanistan, USACE's Afghanistan Engineer District (AED) was tasked to assist in the improvement of schools and clinics in Laghman and Nangarhar provinces. QARs were the key to the success of these projects. Col William E. Bulen, commander of AED, personally handed each of the QARs a certificate of appreciation. COL Bulen spoke to the recipients and audience expressing gratitude for their assistance in the effort to bringing education and health care to all Afghan citizens.

The ability to find these QARs is not that easy in a country where so much is displaced from nearly thirty years of conflict. International Relief and Development (IRD), the USAID logistics contractor, provides quality assurance on projects using Afghan engineers who were able to provide a low profile presence at project sites.



Girls in school, Daka, Nangarhar Province, with no furniture and little space – photo by Ben Wagner.

USAID had 18 schools and 28 clinics on the slate in the beginning and a budget for the project of \$1.89 million. The stakeholders included regional and provincial government, education and health care administrators and ministries, USAID, AED and last but not least the citizens of the communities. After several meetings to review site assessment data, all the

stakeholders agreed on 21 sites for refurbishment and an eight month schedule for project completion.

Making use of the USACEs Three-phase method of quality management, the IRD team was able to focus the contractor on planning prior to execution. The end result is less time spent with repetitive deficiencies by defining each feature of the work prior to starting tasks. The three phases, preparatory, initial and follow-up, focus on maintaining quality of workmanship throughout the construction process.

Hiring in remote regions is done in an effort to keep a low profile and accenting the buy in by the community. This translates to hiring Afghan contractors, Afghan engineers to perform quality assurance and hiring from the local population. Insuring the construction is carried out properly, site foremen responsibilities and construction skills were taught through a construction trade school. Skills training included masonry, plumbing, steel construction, electrical wiring, carpentry and painting.

Afghanistan has limited electricity and industry, an underdeveloped road network and few quality construction materials in country. IRD was instrumental in mentoring the contractor in projecting realistic time lines for material delivery. Many times the material was ordered well in advance of the need on the project site. This allows the project to advance on the normal schedule.

Security of the goods to the project and then on the site adds the need for coordination and cooperation with the local population and the police of the region. Security needs are not from a lawless society, but from the desperation created from almost thirty years of armed conflict and oppression. IRD instilled the need with the contractor for this cooperative effort.

As with any refurbishment of an existing structure – more work is needed than what initial visual inspections may have detected. IRD assisted in the determination to complete the additional reconstruction that became evident through on the spot assessments. The difficulty of returning to remote areas to make modifications drove the desire to modify the contract and completing the work before leaving the project sites. In spite of the unforeseen needs and modified schedule, the projects were completed in less than a year - ahead of the new schedule.

The success of the projects are attributed to the contractor's willingness to learn



Before and after of Qala-e-Marroof school in Nangarhar – Photos courtesy – IRD and Ben Wagner, USACE.

the higher standards expected by AED and the insistence of the IRD team to achieve these standards. The goal of the project was to improve the quality of education for both boys and girls and the health care for all families.

Through the admirable efforts of the IRD team, the goal was achieved. This was abundantly evident through the multiple thank you letters from the school and health care administrators. Their praise was for quality that was head and shoulders above the standard communities were left with on more than one occasion in the past.

With USAID's management and IRD's technical oversight, the construction contract was completed at a cost of \$1.5 million, under budget by \$45 thousand.

The real benefit is the 149 Afghan citizens that are no longer unskilled. They now have the opportunity to work for other contractors or to start their own business. Promote and change the future of the workforce of Afghanistan – nullifying the grasp that the insurgents, the villain's, the oppressors' have had on these remote regions.

For further information about the US Army Corps of Engineers in Afghanistan, visit www.aed.usace.army.mil