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Afghan engineers gain new knowledge from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

KABUL - The Afghanistan Engineer District-North quality assurance branch ensures that all U.S. Army Corps of Engineers construction projects here are built with safety in mind first and quality workmanship.

In the coming weeks, the number of local national quality assurance personnel at AED-N will almost double from 200 to 340. In order to prepare the surge of incoming local nationals for their roles as quality assurance representatives, the AED-N QA branch is holding a three day LNQA 101 training course to teach them good Corps construction practices.

The LNQA training is taught to local nationals by a local national. Ahmadzia Amin is a training instructor for the QA branch here and has been working for AED-N for three months. While attending the engineer college at Kabul University, Amin worked as a quality control manager for a local contractor under an apprenticeship. After graduating college, Amin began teaching as an English instructor. His knowledge and background in construction and teaching along with the fact that he himself is Afghan, is what makes Amin the perfect instructor for teaching the LNQA course according to Sandy Higgins, the deputy chief of the AED-N QA branch.

“Ahmadzia has been remarkable in doing these presentations and teaching the LNQA course,” said Higgins. “He knows how to talk to the local nationals, and you can tell that he just has a passion for teaching. We are really thankful to have him.”

The course that Amin and the QA branch has created combines English- the official language of Engineering, and Dari- one of the national languages of Afghanistan- to create a unique teaching environment for the local nationals where they can get a better understanding for the Corps process, yet feel comfortable enough to ask questions.

“We create a friendly, informal environment so they can be comfortable in the classroom,” Amin said. “Our training is designed to empower the LNQAs so that they can do the job that is expected of them as USACE employees.”

The training consists of lessons in how to detect deficiencies on the job site, how to keep a job site clean and safe, how to develop quality assurance reports and how to detect and verify quality assurance on USACE sites. The LNs also have to take an ethics at work course and learn the various responsibility and authority roles on a job site. Amin said that while all the LNQAs have an engineering background, the teachings that they receive in school isn't always sufficient for working for USACE, which is why this training is so important.

“These are new standards, new technologies,” said Amin. “They are all engineers, but we are globalizing their ideas and familiarizing them with new standards, new codes and new technology. When we teach them how to do inspections, it is all new. “Safety first” is all new, they don’t teach safety here.” While the training that the LNQAs receive now will prepare them to be QA reps for USACE, Higgins said there’s an even greater purpose for the training, to prepare them for the future.

“We are committed in investing everything in our local nationals, to educate them to the best of our ability,” Higgins said. “It is the local nationals who will be here working on our projects from start to finish, and they will be here after the Corps has left Afghanistan so we need to make sure that they know how to build and maintain their project sites.”

Amin agrees and tries to instill in his students the importance of this training, not just for their future, but the future of Afghanistan.

“I tell my students that they will be the eyes, ears and mouths of these projects and practices when the Corps is no longer here, he said. “These students will be our new instructors and will have to keep the training going for future generations.”

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USACE Quality Assurance Branch instructor Ahmadzia Amin (left), answers a local nationals question during the local national quality assurance 101 training. (Corps of Engineers photo by LaDonna Davis)