Functioning phones

They’re bright, they’re shiny, and their intergalactic design is a salute to 1960’s style—the latest addition to Kabul’s streetscape is 300 brightly coloured public telephone booths. Aside from being eye candy amidst the dust of the city streets, the glossy egg-shaped boxes represent a significant accomplishment for communications technology in Afghanistan.

Like many public services in Afghanistan, the public phone system had become decrepit, dilapidated and entirely unusable over the last few decades. Moreover, no data existed that would assist in the rebuilding of the system.

The Ministry of Communication needed a full inventory of all the old defunct phone booths in order to decide which ones should be repaired and which ones should be eliminated. It turned to the Afghan experts at UNDP’s AIMS project. They responded by creating a GIS map of the city which plotted the precise location of every phone booth. The ministry then used that information to help refurbish booths throughout the city. This initiative reduced the cost of telecommunications because it offered a low-cost means of locating and repairing existing booths, rather than building new ones.

Additionally, throughout the course of the project AIMS built GIS (Geographic Information System) capacity in the ministry. Once government staff received GIS training from AIMS, they were seconded back into the project. The phone booth map was then produced in AIMS by the Ministry staff who had originally been trained by AIMS. This cyclical process of training ensures capacity building of ministry staff.

Of the 300 calling points, 150 had been established in busy markets while the remaining in other populated areas. The telephone booths are due to start functioning this week.

Calling cards worth 250 and 500 afghani would be used to make calls from the booths. A call to digital and cell phone number will consume one and five afghanis per minute respectively.

Jamal Nasser Noorzaie, President and CEO of Afghan Telecom who was a partner in this project, said the public phones would help those people who could not afford a mobile set and will be a tremendous opportunity for the public to communicate with each other.
Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration

On 7 July, Afghanistan marked the formal end of the disarmament and demobilisation components of DDR – one of the key elements of the peace process started in Bonn in December 2001.

The Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration programme began in October 2003 with the aim of replacing the former armed forces of Afghanistan with a new, professional Afghan National Army. In the space of just over 20 months it has seen 250 units decommissioned, which has included nine corps, with their divisions, brigades and supporting elements. It has also allowed almost 63,000 former combatants to trade in their weapons for the chance to build a future in civilian life. This makes DDR in Afghanistan among the largest DDR efforts completed worldwide.

As of today there are 62,901 fewer combatants in Afghanistan, while the Ministry of Defence has collected 34,726 light weapons. The major achievement of the process has been the containment under central government control of over 9,085 heavy weapons. This has a far-reaching impact for future security, stability, and expansion of the rule of law. For each soldier now in a job, the civilian economy is growing. For each gun collected, Afghanistan is becoming safer. DDR has also resulted in savings to the government of over $120 million per year in salaries and other payments, allowing the government to focus its resources on the Afghan National Army and National Police.

A New Era in Human Rights Protection in Prison System

A milestone was recently achieved in Afghanistan’s road to human rights protection in the administration of justice with the adoption of the new Penitentiary Law. In the current situation, the prison system is unable to uphold the basic international human rights standards related to persons deprived of their freedom. Afghanistan however has acceded to key international human rights treaties for such protection. The passing of the Penitentiary Law which incorporates all the required protections according to international standards signals a significant commitment by Afghanistan to implement the provisions of international human rights treaties.

Steps are underway to train prison officials on the new law and the changes that it brings in the way they do their job. Important changes brought by the law include provisions for separate facilities for juveniles, convicted and awaiting trial detainees, and requirements for adequate facilities for women. The law also sets out important matter such as the minimum space to be allocated to each prisoner to ensure that the conditions are humane.

Civil Service internship graduation

July 11: A small group of outstanding graduate-level students gathered at the Civil Service Commission to receive certificates and accolades as the first to complete the professional programme.

The graduation ceremony marked the completion of a successful pilot phase for the Civil Service Internship Programme, which offered 16 female and eight male graduates direct exposure to the work of technical ministries of the Afghan Government. With technical support from UNDP and financial backing from the Government of France, the programme was developed to complement formal and theoretical University education with practical professional work experience for students.

At the same time, the programme has the added value of providing the Afghan civil
service with highly qualified young professionals specialized in various technical fields.

"In our Constitution it says that women have equal rights now," reflecting on her experience, Freda shares her feelings about the challenges ahead as one of Afghanistan’s future leaders in the effort to institutionalize gender equity. "But it is one thing to have such rights stated, and quite another thing to make the policy and laws that guard those rights ... and still another thing to have those laws implemented." Freda understands well the challenges of institutionalizing fairness. During her internship, Freda helped to draft a new Civil Service Law that defines the non-partisan and merit-based values upon which personnel recruitment, promotion and appointments throughout the civil service are determined. The law is due to be ratified by the Government Cabinet within the next few weeks.

**Tahera Kamiri tops law graduates Judicial Training Course**

Tahera Kamiri has every reason to be proud of herself. In a first for the Law Graduates Judicial Training Course, and indeed for gender advancement, a female student graduated at the top of the class. Tahera outclassed 124 other predominantly male students in the year-long training course managed by the Judicial Reform Commission, with support from the UNDP Justice Programme. On July 4 2005, Tahera led the graduands in the graduation ceremony marking the successful completion of the course. In a fitting tribute, H.E Dr. Masooda Jalal, Minister of Women’s Affairs, the guest of honour, presented Tahera with her graduation certificate.

**Tyranny of averages challenging Afghan development progress**

Kabul, Afghanistan, 4 July 2005: A new report launched 1 July warns that in Asia and the Pacific, the rising prosperity and fast growth in populous countries like China and India is hiding widespread extreme poverty in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The result is potentially very debilitating to development efforts in the 14 Asia-Pacific LDCs.

This “tyranny of averages” to which the report refers tends to mask the stark contrast between the Asia-Pacific LDCs’ sluggish economies and the success of their far more populous neighbours.

As a result, the report states that development aid and debt relief to the Asia-Pacific LDCs have been disproportionately low and must be increased if these impoverished countries are to reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which represent the global framework for fighting poverty.

The report is called *Voices of the Least Developed Countries of Asia and the Pacific: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals Through a Global Partnership*.

Afghanistan features prominently among many of the disturbing statistics presented in the report. In Afghanistan:
• More than half (56%) of the population lives below the national poverty line, the highest rate in Asia-Pacific LDCs
• GDP per capita in 2003 was US$167, the lowest among Asia-Pacific LDCs; this compares to an average of US$513 for Asia-Pacific LDCs as a whole, $310 in LDCs in other regions
• Progress toward attainment of the MDGs: Afghanistan is an underachiever in proportion of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption [with deteriorating trend]; net enrolment ratio in primary education, under-5 mortality rate; infant mortality rate. Lags behind overall average in Asia-Pacific LDCs on several indicators.
• Cited positively for holding popular elections, a significant achievement that can give donors more confidence in efficient use of their resources
• Afghanistan is also positively cited for preparing a MDG progress report

The report was a collaborative effort by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) on behalf of the region’s LDCs. It was prepared under the auspices of the UNDP Asia and Pacific Regional Centre in Colombo, which provides policy research and analysis, strategic policy advice and advocacy services to 37 countries in the region on pro-poor policies, international trade and investment, HIV/AIDS and gender equality.

The full report is available for download at: http://www.undp.org.af/media_room/archives/key_docs/docs/voices_least_developed_countries_asia.pdf

EVENTS

Justice Workshop and Showcase of Accomplishments

The Ministry of Justice will soon be launching its policy paper ‘Justice for All’. As part of this process, the ministry is holding a workshop to provide a structured forum for all participants in the justice sector in Afghanistan to discuss and provide feedback on Justice for All.

As part of the workshop, the ministry is organizing a showcase where all participants will be invited to display the work that they have been doing and share their experiences and accomplishments with their colleagues. The ministry will allocate booths to interested participants so that they can hand out materials about their work, show films, discuss with visitors, or otherwise spread information about their programs.

Purpose
1. Discuss and provide input to the Ministry’s justice plan, ‘Justice for All’ document.
2. Showcase what different organisations have accomplished in the justice sector.
3. Networking opportunity.

Target Audience: Justice Sector Stakeholders
1. Government Ministries and other Agencies
2. Donors
3. NGOs
4. Civil Society

August 15 - 17 2005
Intercontinental Hotel, Kabul
For more information please contact: fakhria.assad@undp.org 070155283

DONORS

6 July 2005: Japan signed a USD$17 million agreement with UNDP; an expression of Japan’s commitment to simultaneously address peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan. The funds provided by the Government of Japan will go towards UNDP’s National Area Based Development Programme, under the leadership of MRRD, which will facilitate long-term macro economic planning in the regions and the training of government staff. In addition, the immediate need for
urban employment, increased agricultural productivity, and the reduction of the landmine threat will be addressed in partnership with the Ministries of Urban Development and Housing, and of Agriculture, together with the UNDP-supported Programme Implementation Unit, FAO and the United Nations Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan (UNMACA). The UNDP agreement was one of three agreements that were signed by Japan, totalling USD31.36 million. UNICEF received USD$4.7 million for its immunization programme and the Ministry of Education received USD$9.56 million to construct 32 schools in the provinces of Kabul, Parwan and Kandahar.

Other contributions include:
7 July South Korea Elections USD500,000
17 July SIDA SEAL USD1.27m
14 July SIDA Elections USD1.27m
14 July Norway Elections USD1.1m
26 July Northern Ireland ANBP USD225,000
20 July Japan Elections USD8m
15 July Ireland Elections USD960,000

NEW STAFF

**Tina Gewis** (Austria) joins the UNDP Democratization & Civil Society Empowerment Programme as a Programme Officer (JPO position) working on the Justice Sector. She has been working for the OSCE mission in Albania and as a Human Rights Officer for the UN peacekeeping mission in Burundi. tina.gewis@undp.org +93 (0)70 177122

**Bashirullah Khpalwan** joined the UNDP State Building and Government Support Unit as a Programme Associate working on the Support to Law and Order Project and Counter Narcotics Trust Fund. He has been working for the World Food Programme, and Demobilization and Reintegration Commission in the past. bashirullah.khpalwan@undp.org (0)70 048 035

**M. Younus Payab** (Afghanistan) joins the UNDP Promotion of Sustainable Livelihood programme as head of unit and Assistant Country Director (ACD). He has been working as program officer for the LOTFA project in UNDP Afghanistan and RRR officer for UNAMA Kandahar. younus.payab@undp.org

**Phil Stenchion** (Australia) joins us as the Disaster Risk Management Advisor, after similar roles in Papua New Guinea, and for the UN in Timor Leste. Phil has been a disaster management professional since 1989 and has worked all around the South Pacific and South East Asia. philip.stenchion@undp.org 070 048034

**Naim Hamdard** (Afghanistan) joins the Country Office External Relations Unit as a translator. Naim was most recently at ARDS working on the TAFSU project. naim.hamdard@undp.org

**Richard Ponzio** has recently arrived from Oxford, England, where he is based with his wife Kuniko. As a Strategic Planning Advisor, he will assist the country team on a programme support strengthening exercise, upcoming programming missions, the Country Programme Action Programme (2006-2008), and the development of staff capacity in the areas of policy analysis, dialogue and advocacy, with a special near-term focus on the Afghanistan National Development Strategy. richard.ponzio@undp.org 93 (0)70 089 566

For more information or contributions, please contact Emma Sutcliffe, UNDP, Communications Associate emma.sutcliffe@undp.org, 070152874