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AFGHAN NGOs COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

Carried out by:
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Funded by Novib
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(**NOVIB - CaBARP**)

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Acronyms

ACBAR	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief
AREA	Agency for Rehabilitation and Energy Conservation in Afghanistan
CaBARP	Capacity Building Project for an Agricultural Revival Programme
CA	Christian Aid
CBO	Community Based Organizations
CHA	Coordination for Humanitarian Assistance
CM	Community Mobilizers
COMs	Correspondence Management Systems
CTA	Chief Technical Advisor
EW	Extension Workers
FTP	File Transfer Protocol
FM	Finance Manager
FRO	Farah Regional Office
HRO	Herat Regional Office
ICTD	Information Communication Technology Department
ISP	Internet Service Provider
KRO	Kandahar Regional Office
MD	Managing Director
NGO	Non Government Organization
NOVIB	Netherlands Organization for International Development Cooperation
PCC	Provincial Coordination Committee
PCB	Provincial Coordinating Body
RM	Regional Manager
RO	Regional Office
UN	United Nations

Thanks!

This research is not written as an evaluation; rather, it is written to identify communication issues and themes for better use of the planned Web-based Resource Centre. This report represents the views and perspectives of a variety of people in the partner organizations. Whilst being able to carry out the research and present this report, I must not forget to thank those who have helped me throughout this process. I wish to extend my warmest appreciation to:

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- All participants of the research - for their most valuable time and bearing me during the interviews and just staying together. The generosity of the Partner agencies involved in donating their time and experience for this process, as well as their willingness to share their experience with me.

I really wish this report be a as a step forward towards identifying the communication barriers within and without the Partner NGOs, a process towards identification of proper ways to develop and use the planned Web-based Resource Centre and to find practical ways to incorporate the use of internet into Partner NGOs works.

I also want this report to be an important document for us to learn how to identify and meet the challenges for use of internet-based resource centers, and would welcome recommendations to develop it further.

Sincerely Yours,

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1. Introduction and Executive Summary:

NOVIB, through CaBARP and other programmes places high value on capacity, organizational and system development of the partner organization, with the aim to facilitate their institutional development within Afghan Society. This is considered by both NOVIB and the partner organizations as prerequisite for a viable process of post-war recovery and democratic development with civic power of governance.

Proper communication and information flow in the Partner NGOs is the key for effective and efficient translation of their strategic aims and values into their programme activities. Due to lack of physical infrastructure, political and security issues inside Afghanistan, communication between NGOs and their Regional Offices are difficult and time consuming. Except for some regional offices, many have hardly any communication means between their Head Quarters, Regional and Project Offices. Weekly, monthly and quarterly meetings provide opportunity for the field and HQ staff to have some interaction. Staff from one Regional Office seldom visits other regions to exchange ideas and share experiences.

Community Mobilizers (CMs) and Extension Workers (EWs) are used as focal point to introduce Partner's programs and projects to communities. Interaction between CMs and EWs with technical staff at the field level is regular. In all of three Partners, the mobilization and organization of Shuras is aimed at creating a sustainable social infrastructure at the grassroots level that may help accelerate reconstruction and rehabilitation in Afghanistan. They also built on a traditional system of Shuras and cooperatives and have been successful in reviving it.

All the three Partners are represented at various coordination meetings of donors in the HQ and some field levels. There are NGO coordination bodies in some of the regions where partners are represented and have actively participated. There are also some sectorial groups in which NGOs and UN agencies participate and coordinate activities in particular sectors. There are less coordination meetings taking place between the project, technical and sectorial staff of Partner NGOs in the project and field level.

Government offices in the provinces are the coordination agencies between the partner organizations but sometimes it is 'as and when needed'. There is a growing realization amongst the Partner NGOs that by improving management support to the regional offices, capacity building/ training and gradually delegating some key functions, communication and coordination between head offices and regional offices would improve. In the meantime, developing proper coordination mechanisms, e.g. ANCB and ACBAR in the provinces such as Farah and Kandahar would facilitate great deal of information sharing and coordination of the activities at the field level. On the other hand, staffs of the Partner NGOs feel the need for holding regular meetings at the regional level, joint visits by technical staff of different projects, from one region to another. This would considerably improve communication and coordination between these offices.

Partner NGOs in the last two years benefited greatly from their use of the Internet/ email through reduced transmission costs, access to new and relevant information, and greater contact with their own offices and partner organizations. It is expected that the role of the internet/ email and e-learning would change further over the years in Afghanistan. Staff of the Partner NGOs are also increasingly looking to use it to support their current aid work practices.

2. Objectives, Work Scope and Methodology:

The Capacity for Agricultural Revival Project (CaBARP) was developed by NoVIB and funded by both the European Commission and NoVIB to build the capacity of three Afghan Partner NGOs in area of livelihood programming. O-Retechs, a small Afghan NGO as the executing agency for the project is expected to provide support to the Partner NGOs through four components:

- Training
- Provision of Master Trainers
- Subject Matter Specialists
- A Resource Centre

In October 2004, O-Retechs and the Partner Organizations jointly agreed to develop a web-based resource centre in order to strengthen the internet capacity of Partner NGOs and to provide a source of needed information and data.

This study and report begins with an assessment of the actual demand for such a Web-based Resource Centre on Rural Development and Livelihood programming, and aims to identify best ways for users to access relevant information.

The Report also focuses on possible constraints to the real use of Web-based Resource Centre and discusses the realistic practices to mitigate these communication constraints. Furthermore it provides an analysis of the actual utilization of all means of information e.g. internet, books, radio, TV etc and possible ways of promoting their availability to the staff of the Partner NGOs and other target audience. Last but not least it focuses on the way information is processed within different organizational structures.

2.1 Objective of the Services:

The main objective of this study was to assess the target audience (staff of Afghan Partner NGOs) in order to find out:

- What is their preferred way to receive their information
- who are their trusted communicators
- what form do they prefer to receive their information
- How do they use internet and other communication systems

2.2 Scope of Work

2.2.1 Target Audience:

This study was focused on the target audience information needs, motivation and best practices. As noted, the target audience for this study was the two main Afghan Partner

NGOs¹ (ADA and CHA) with a sampling of staff from Headquarter, field level staff and their target communities².

Since it is out of scope of this study to focus on all field and project offices of these 2 Afghan NGOs, focal districts within three provinces, Kandahar, Farah and Kabul were identified for study, these were areas where the NGOs were implementing EC funded Livelihood Projects.

In particular this study focuses on, communication, Information sharing within the organizations, capacity building and Internet access.

2.3 Research Methodology:

2.3.1 Direct Methods:

The Researcher was given the task of selecting and interviewing individual staff members at both the headquarter and field level. To do this, a questionnaire was developed by the CTA and the Principle Researcher (Consultant) to further guide the process. However during the interview, direct and personal contact with the interviewee in the form of a dialogue was carried out by the Consultant allowing for more emphasis on direct observation and spontaneous response. Interviews and discussions provided an opportunity for observing the interviewee in his/her "normal" working environment. Hence the whole process provided not only information on the personality and behavior patterns of the interviewee but also their different actions in different situations. The consultant tried his best to use his ability to communicate with the interviewee in the best manner. During this process of direct study the following methods was carried out:

- Survey using questionnaire, indirectly
- Observing the interviewee in his/ her work-spot (office, field, group-meeting (official and unofficial) etc.
- Dialogue with the interviewee
- Observing the interviewee while communication and providing information
- Observing the interviewee while at discussion with his/ her colleagues
- Observing the interviewee while giving a briefing/demonstration etc.
- Interviewing the interviewee, his/ her supervisors, subordinates, and
- Personal and informal contacts with the interviewee.

2.3.1 Indirect Methods:

The Indirect Method of the study was based on a review of the daily work done by the interviewee at his/ her office, including written proposals, reports, letters, reading materials, records of the daily official activities etc. This process showed the level of understanding, direction, knowledge of the interviewee and his/ her ability to communicate ideas in writing or oral with other colleagues. The following methods were used during this process:

¹ Initially it was planned to include AREA in the process, but due to some evaluation processes in AREA, the staff of the organization was not able to take part in this study.

² Formal and informal interviews were conducted with the target communities at the project sites, both in Kandahar and Farah

- Study of documents used by the interviewee
- Analysis of interviewee's response/ feedback to information provided
- Study of reports, letters proposals etc., written by the interviewee
- Going through some correspondence and reports prepared and received by the interviewee
- Study of records of activities/ meetings/ events attended by the interviewee.

Findings

3. Communication & Coordination within Partner NGOs:

3.1 Programme and Projects:

At Project Implementation level:

In order to facilitate the implementation of community projects, both ADA and CHA work through Community Mobilizers (CMs) and Extension Workers (EWs) as a focal point to introduce programs and projects to the community members. Once community needs/interests are identified and terms of partnership agreed upon, the technical staff of a particular program is introduced to the community to carry out further activities. From that point onward, there seems to be a regular interaction between the CMs/ EW and the communities³, with the technical staff visiting communities as well. When planning a project for a community, the technical staff also relies on information provided by the Regional Managers (RMs) and CMs/ EWs, including their overall view.

At the Regional level:

Mechanisms exist for regular meetings in the ROs in both Partner NGOs that is used as a communication and coordination channel for different project managers, supervisors and coordinators. In the Head Offices, the heads of the departments (Managers and Coordinators) communicate and coordinate their activities. As observed the heads of departments also visit or have real time communication⁴ with the relevant departments in the ROs. However on some occasions the coordination is not carried through at the regional or field level offices, for example, activities jointly planned by a particular department are not translated into other departments either in the HQ or in the field. (is it possible to give an example here?)

Meetings so take place between HQ and Regional level staff. Managers/ Coordinators are regularly invited to the HQs for work presentations and future plans. However it was suggested that it would be useful if Regional Managers could also hold regular meetings at the regional level to bring their staff together. In addition, joint visits by technical staff of different ROs would provide an opportunity to improve communication and coordination between different ROs.

At present, communication between one region to another is largely limited to the operational side of the work e.g. facilitation mail/ pouch delivery, delivering radio messages, helping each other in transportation or logistical support. Since this type of

³ They can be used as a bridge between the Partners and the Community for delivering the resources and material produced in best ways possible.

⁴ CHA staff, through MSN Messenger, can communicate with the internet-connected regions in the real time

communication between regions already exists it would be interesting to see if broadening the communication to take in the concept of cross monitoring whereby staff from one project is assigned the additional responsibility of monitoring another project, could be introduced. This could be an effective tool to expose staff to various programs and projects and build their capacities, communication and coordination capacities for internal promotion.

It was noted that the project field staff of the Partner NGOs sometimes overburden the Administrator and RM to carry out tasks which they could do themselves and have been given the authority to do so. It seems that this is largely due to the lack of technical know how and temporary nature of some project staff making them less confident and less informed about overall activities of the Regional Offices.

3.2 Headquarter and Regional Offices:

Generally communication between the HQs, Regional and Project Offices/ sites of the Partner NGOs are through:

- Pouch System
- Mobile Telephones
- Radio Systems
- Internet/ Email Systems
- Satellite Telephones
- Office or Public Transportation
- Meetings and Visits

Pouch is hand carried by staff and other people visiting regional office. Sometimes e-mail facilities are available with the regional offices or sometimes other organizations like United Nations (UN), Christian Aid (CA) and others can, when asked, provide temporary email support to the Partners. For example if a donor organization in a region has access to the internet, they cooperate with the partners to use their resources in a temporary basis for sending and receiving emails.

Mobile telephone networks are a new development facilitating communication especially for the regional office and project sites. Exceptions to this include provinces such as Farah or Uruzgan⁵ that have no mobile network available yet. Besides the use of mobile telephones are very limited in districts outside provincial capitals or major cities.

Out side some provincial capitals and major cities, communication hugely depend on Satellite Telephones (Thuraya)⁶, High Frequency Radios such as Codan and other Radio systems. There are Radio Systems (HF, VHF or CODAN) available in most of the regional or project offices. Every top of the hour Radio messages are communicated between different radio departments. However, the problem with the system is that if urgent matters arise outside official hours or staff from project offices/ sites wants to communicate with the RO⁷, they have to deliver the message themselves using any transportation means available.

⁵ Provinces mentioned are part of areas either covered during this Research or information obtained through CHA or ADA Regional Offices

⁶ CHA Farah Office use Satellite Telephones

⁷ ADA Kandahar Office has limited Radio communication with the Project Offices or Sites

Satellite telephones are quite expensive to use⁸. The problem with the Codan systems is that for receiving signals an antenna is attached to the system. This antenna is clearly visible from a long distance. In the past offices or cars carrying these antennas are targeted by anti-government elements, hence installing such systems is a security risk. Therefore communication from field or project offices to either ROs or HQ is quite difficult, time consuming or sometimes impossible.

Meetings at the HQ and the ROs of the Partner NGOs are held on weekly, by weekly, monthly, quarterly and on annual basis⁹. These meetings provide opportunity for the staff to have some interaction and communication with each other. RMs or Coordinators mainly meet at the HQ. Monthly meetings are held at RO level where all the section heads participate in the meeting. Weekly or by weekly meetings are mainly organized by Admin departments. However, due to heavy work load and absence of the project staff sometimes it is not possible to hold the meetings on weekly or bi-weekly basis. Having said that, sometimes meetings are not held on time and it is ideal that the management at the ROs pay more attention to this.

Interviewees noted the need for the HQ staff to develop a clear-cut plan of visits to the ROs and the field. Sometimes despite communication problems between the RO and the project sites, the regional and project managers and other RO staff visit the projects less than expected. This sometimes leads to poor communication and coordination among management and affects the interpersonal relationship between the regional staff, It also gives rise to the question as to how information from the field gets up to the Regional and Head Office level?

Staff from one RO seldom visits other regions to exchange ideas and share experiences. Training and workshops provide the only opportunities where staff from different regions can meet and discuss mutual interests. Likewise there are hardly any other chances or mechanism for the project staff to visit HQ and meet HQ staff, they need to go through long communication channels, through their managers etc. and their message is lost in translation! For example RO staff in a department usually discuss their projects and sometimes come up with innovative ways of improving their practices. This is sometimes hard to put in a narrative project report which is edited by the RMs and then sent to the HQ or asked to be written in English language.

In the Management/ Directors/ Coordinators meetings, the RMs/ Director/ Coordinator report on all regional activities and discuss their region's future plans with other members of the Management Team/ Board of Directors. Due to busy schedules of regional staff, the HQ Management or Sectorial Heads can plan field visits and inform the RM and the concerned staff in advance. This would improve communication/coordination between various offices considerably. Once the communication infrastructure inside Afghanistan improves and security allow¹⁰, more frequent inter-office communication will take place.

⁸ It costs 80pence/ minute with other Thuraya Satellite Phone

⁹ CHA Board Meetings are held on Quarterly Basis and ADA's Management Meetings are held on Monthly Basis. General Assemblies are held on Annual Basis, however in the ROs Administrative or other meetings are supposed to be held more frequently, which are not.

¹⁰ Many western and south western provinces

3.3 Government & Donors:

The Ministry of Economy has a department responsible for NGO affairs including coordination of their activities on the ground and their registration with the government of Afghanistan. Every donor, NGO and development agency must inform the government of their activities. In addition, all Afghan NGOs must have registered with the Planning Ministry before undertaking any activities inside Afghanistan and must submit protocols signed with donors as well as regular activity reports. ADA and CHA is registered with the government and their relationship with the government is considered positive. At the lower level, the district government provides permission for establishing Shuras. Once the Shura decides on its membership and office bearers, this is also communicated, through the Shura members and the CMs/ EWs to the district government. This makes the Shura legitimized.

Communication and coordination with donor agencies is good at all levels. ADA and CHA are represented at various coordination meetings of donors. Both Partner NGOs are members of different coordination bodies such as ACBAR ANCB etc. In most cases, both Partner NGOs approach certain donors with proposal to undertake activities based on community needs. If these are in line with the donor priorities, the funding is secured and relationship established. Donors also inform Partner NGO of their funding prospects and Partners responds by submitting proposals.

I) CHA HQ:

In the Head Quarter, a good deal of information and data is shared using the internal computer and internet networking systems. The network manages and shares the data through the computers connected to it. Internet/ email and MSN messenger is widely used for the real time communication. There is an internal telephone exchange supporting communication between different departments. The pouch system within the Admin department sends and receives the hard copy of the documents. The incoming documents are processed by the Admin department and then forwarded to the relevant sections. The general internal correspondence is in Dari and external communications with the donors and other agencies is in English.

A mail box is also set up in Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR). In addition, communication and interactions are made through different meetings. Board meetings are held on quarterly basis in presence of the Managing Director (MD) and board members. The information is shared with others through minutes of the meetings. In the regions the information is shared by the ROs/ Coordinators. Sectorial meetings are held and management committees are supposed to hold meetings every 15¹¹ days. Capacity building trainings are held at the HQ by the Capacity Building Department and different staff from the regions are invited to participate in these trainings. Staff both in the Capacity Building Department and the regions expressed that useful and regular training packages are offered for all staff¹². On some occasions interaction between the RO and HQ staff¹³ is limited. Except training of field staff at the HQ, there is hardly any other mechanism for the field staff to share their views or visit HQ.

¹¹ Both meetings are not very frequently held due to different reasons.

¹² In the Farah region, the health department for instance has a training centre where different material and information is provided by the health department at the HQ

¹³ Lower-ranking staff

The MIS (Management Information System) system is not developed enough to respond to the needs and demands of staff. The system is over 5 years old and the information/ data available in the systems is not adequate enough to meet different departmental needs. Despite that MIS personal is hired for particular ROs, the systems is not developed and the data is not gathered and share through the system. For instance it was expected that details of project proposals, reports, reporting formats be available in the system and shared accordingly. It might be useful for a study to be carried out to identify and provide solutions to this issue.

Each sector has a person responsible for the report writing. Data from the projects are sent to the relevant reporting department. The reports are then finalized by the Programme Departments and forwarded to the donors. Copies of the final reports are kept at the HQ and relevant RO. All projects have a MIS correspondent numbers.

When a Donor funds a project, a team is assigned to hold meetings with the relevant project staff to share project objectives and activities. Follow up visits are continuously carried out by HQ staff to check on progress. Project reports are sent via email¹⁴.

CHA has a website which is up and running but hardly visited or updated either by staff or promoted outside the organization. A website could be a very good source of information on the organization especially for the organizations outside the country. It might be useful to develop a mechanism to regularly update and promote this site.

The pouch system, where documents such as reports, letters, proposals and related paper work are sent to and received from is slow and not very systematic. For instance in Farah Regional Office (FRO) the pouch destined to HQ or other regions need to be sent to Herat Regional Office (HRO), sometimes via public transport. This is sometimes unreliable and time consuming. Suggestions for improving this are:

- External pouch systems are available, probably expensive, but they could help deliver the pouch to different regions speedily.
- More human and other resources could be hired to do the job of delivering the pouch to different regions. They could work under the Admin department.
- Departments and systems such as Recording and COMs responsible for managing recording incoming and outgoing documents needs to be further developed.

I.i) CHA Farah:

Farah Regional Office has well developed communication systems. Internet, Satellite telephone, Radio, Pouch, transportation and other systems are widely used. MSN Messenger¹⁵ facilitates real time communication with the HQ and sometimes with other regions. During the night when the internet is not in use, Satellite telephones are used to communicate with the HQ or other regions. Radio systems are also used to leave messages to the recipients. Pouch system is used for sending the paper work, undeliverable by the email or Radio messages. However, as noted, it takes up to a week

¹⁴ This is practiced where internet connection is available

¹⁵ MSN messenger is used in most of the regions for communication with the HQ and other ROs

for the pouch to reach to the HQ since it is sent via HRO. HRO usually send the documents via air to Kabul.

Internet/ email, Satellite telephones (Thuraya) and radio systems are used to communicate with the other ROs. Thuraya phone is used in FRO since no mobile network is available in the province. Considering the infrastructure and lack of communication facilities in the province, FRO have managed to develop good communication systems in this region. For instance just a couple of days before Consultant's visit to the region, Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) representative, while visiting FRO was very impressed by communication facilities available there. PRT needed urgent health data and maps and FRO have managed to get the information after sending emails to the HQ, very quickly.

Radio systems are used to communicate with project sites. Radio is switched on from 8 am to 12 noon and after an hour break, from 1 to 4pm. Communication is held at the top of the hours. Communication using the Thuraya/ Satellite phone is expensive though. It costs up to US\$ 3/ minute. Telephone services are also available through the Ministry of Communication in the city which costs approximately US\$ 1.20/ minute. There are plenty example of a good communication systems in the FRO.

Management, Sectorial and Administrative Meetings are held with the participation of all the staff. In the sectorial meetings, head of the departments present their activities and future plans to the other staff in the RO. As far as the coordination of activities between CHA and the other aid agencies at the province level is concerned, Provincial Coordination Committees (PCC) and Programme Coordinating Body (PCB) carry out the coordination job. With the representation from aid organizations working in the Farah, it somehow avoids overlap of activities. On the district level, CHA health supervisor and other project supervisors are responsible for all communication and coordination. But coordination of the activities with the other organizations is not enough. For example all the organizations participating in the PCC present their programme operations and future plans through regular reports, but some organizations like Afghan Red Cross and Crescent which operates in Farah province is not part of PCC and their reporting system. To solve this provincial bodies such as Government Provincial Directorates (Health, Education or other Directorates) can help coordinate weekly or monthly reports from these organizations and distribute them to the rest of the members. Provincial Health Directorate in Farah has the capacity and been helpful in the past to act as a coordination body between the NGOs specially operating in the health sector, this work can be carried out by other governmental departments too.

Health is a major sector in FRO. The internet facility is used by the health department more often, through the one computer available with the RM, but the department itself doesn't have access to the web. Due to the nature and capacity of the work, Health department needs to have real time internet communication with the HQ as well, because major developments taking place with the clinics and hospitals in Farah should be communicated and coordinated with the health department staff at the HQ¹⁶. Computer networking between computers and printers was established in the FRO, including the health department sometimes back, but due to some technical problems the systems has been disconnect. A proper computer networking system would greatly

¹⁶ CHA provides majority health services in Farah, more than any other organization, including the government

help this and other departments not only share information/ data but also use the internet/ email facilities. Generally Health Department communicates and access general information through the internet. Quarterly Health Sector Coordination Meetings are held in the regions. Besides every 3pm contacts are established with the Health focal point at the HQ to inform them of any urgent or other programme developments. Information is also obtained through health training centre in the FRO. The training centre has the capacity for up to 30 participants at a time. Technical Support Department at the HQ also sends updated information and material on health to this centre via the internet and pouch. Regular and update workshops are conducted weekly to health department staff through the updated material received form the HQ. To improve the communication, the health department needs to have an internet connection, besides HQ needs to be available during the fixed times¹⁷ for real time communication with the Health Department in the HQ.

There is a problem of communicating in short wave inside the Farah city. For instance while in meetings, purchases and procurements, travel, receiving visitor from the airport, and other office activities inside the city, there is hardly any telephone or other means to establish communication either with the FRO or other places. FRO also do not have an Intercom to communicate internally between different departments. Staff usually goes to other departments for communication purposes, sometimes they write letters. It is a waste of time and also keeps different departments less informed about each other.

There are some problems with the reports and emails getting to either HQ or other Regions. Admin Department is responsible for sending and receiving emails and sometimes are overburdened by project or other staff computer, communication or other works. Sometimes it causes delays to send and received emails or other correspondence, other Regions or HQ. For example sometimes it takes 10 or more days for an email to get to HQ. This goes back to the practice where other departments delegate their responsibilities to Administration, e.g. email and internet communications. If all departments have access to the internet this problem could easily be solved.

In the project offices and sites, Radio System is the main source of communication with the FRO and other projects. There is a Radio System in each project. Besides people from the FRO or the HQ visit and share ideas and information with the people in the field. The Project Offices have weekly and monthly progress reports which is sent to FRO and then forwarded to the HQ accordingly. Besides, staff visiting from the field provides information about their project activities. Weekly Admin meetings are also held in which all the department heads participate, they share information about their departments. Admin distributes the minute to all other departments.

II) ADA HQ:

Given the peculiar circumstances inside Afghanistan and shortage of human resources, most of the project managers/supervisors/coordinators in ADA are reasonably qualified, experienced, committed and supportive of ADA's programs and activities. They are considered cooperative by many development organizations working inside Afghanistan. ADA has good sources of access to the information at the HQ level. Through different Capacity Building Programmes, materials are developed and kept in the office library for

¹⁷ They have fixed 3pm everyday for real time communication with the HQ, but sometimes they are not available

the staff use. Good contacts are also maintained both in official and personal levels with the staff of the Partner NGOs such as AREA, CHA and others. This is mainly because the staff turn over is very low in the organization and people who are working with ADA are there for average of 6 years.

Daily communication with other ROs is through the Radio systems, mobile phones, pouch system, Satellite Telephones and Internet/email¹⁸. Urgent issues are communicated through the Satellite phones, also urgent and confidential issues are communicated in person. ADA has an email/ internet system with Kandahar Regional Office (KRO) The use of the internet and email systems in KRO, however, is limited to one computer¹⁹. It would be ideal if the system is expanded to the other regions as well, because some provinces where ADA ROs are located can have access to the internet systems. Mobile networks are available in KRO, which means staff can communicate with mobile telephones, but the network coverage is limited to the Kandahar city and districts nearby. Many districts where some ADA projects are located are outside coverage zones.

Internet is also used to access to information. Contacts between different departments are through internal telephone network, mobile phones, internet/ email, meetings and other direct contacts. Letters are regularly CC'd to inform each other about activities and developments taking place in other departments and ROs. Informal meetings and getting together, on lunch breaks and outside office hours, are regular communication means.

ADA have nine Radio Communication centers in areas of its operation. Radio systems are used from 8am to 4pm, on the top of each hour messages are delivered to or from one center to another. There are good coordination mechanisms between the Radio Communication Centers where if one Center has problems getting their message through to other Center, they deliver the message to third party. Radio systems are, however, sometimes time consuming and scheduling radio communication at the same time in both places is difficult. If there is something urgent, it is difficult communicate with other ROs.

Communication and messages received through Radios systems are sent to RMs. Two Codan Radio stations also operates in ADA, one is located in HQ and the other in KRO. The rest of the Radio systems are ICOM. Due to the lack of computer and a communication cable in the Radio department at KRO, Codan systems is only used for the voice messages, despite that the system can also deliver up to a certain number of words in the form of text messages.

The Management Team meets on monthly basis to discuss mainly the progress in their activities and the future plans. Major issues confronting the organization and its programs are discussed at length and strategy formulated, during these meetings. New ideas and projects are also brought up for discussion and deliberated upon.

All staff can easily communicate with the MD, through person to person contacts, emails sent or printed out, lunch and other breaks, letters, internal telecom etc. MD usually forwards relevant information to different departments using the internet/ email. There are however, problems with sending and receiving paper work such as reports, letters

¹⁸ ADA Kandahar Regional Office have access to the Internet

¹⁹ The hub have the capacity for max 8 and minimum of 5 computer connections

and other documents through the pouch system. For instance ADA Uruzgan Finance Manager (FM) is usually travels to KRO to send and receive financial reports and other documents. HQ and ROs, like other aid agencies in Afghanistan have problems sending and receiving pouches.

Recently ADA carried out an organizational assessment and developed a new organizational structure. Majority of staff are very positive about that this processes would further help increase their communication and coordination. ADA needs to focus on its publications and marketing techniques. ADA has worked hard to put up a website, it needs to be further developed, regularly updated and marketed to outsiders. Very informative publication like Parmakhtag (Development) needs to start publication on regular basis. Like in the past, Parmakhtag should also include different stake-holders views about the organization direction as well. With the help new structure and staffing it is expected that the department responsible for the publication and marketing of the organization is further strengthened. The proposed Web-based Resource Centre can have good contacts with these publication departments. The publication departments could usually access and distribute information from the Resource Centre to wider audience through the magazines and other publications. Community can also access these information through these magazines and newsletters if community mobilizers/ social workers/ extension workers received training in how to transfer the knowledge and information from the Resource Centre to illiterate communities.

The ICT department at the HQ has plans to develop a wireless computer networking system. At the moment the cable networking connects most of the computers in the office.

II.i) ADA Kandahar:

Staff in the regions has different priorities and information needs. In the site staff need information on security issues. It is not safe work in different project sites without prior security assurance and information. Management on the other hand needs information on the human resource market, especially for the labor intensive projects such as construction, Kariz cleaning etc. For proper coordination of the activities, management also needs information about other organizations operating in the area. Kandahar has been a fighting zone and most of the area is contaminated with mines. Coordination of information with the mine clearance organizations is also a must-know information. At present KRO has four projects; Horticulture, Irrigation and Water Harvesting/ Kariz Cleaning, Vocational Training, Youth Development Programme (YDP).

In Kandahar there are almost 5,000 Pakistani skilled labor working in different activities, which means there is a lack of local trained capacity in technical fields. This is the main reason for the ADA to start implementing a Vocational Training Centre.

For communication with the projects in the city²⁰ and nearby districts, KRO use mobile phones, Radio systems, project visits and person to person contacts. With the project sites without mobile telephones, Radio system is used²¹. Intercom telephone facilitates communication with different departments at KRO. There appears to be good project

²⁰ Vocational Training Centre and Youth Development Programme is located in the Kandahar City

²¹ The use of the Radio System is limited to some projects and is not widely available

reporting at KRO, for instance in Kariz cleaning project²², the field engineer collects the data from the field, takes it to his supervisor engineer and then after double checking the data it is forwarded RM/Director and then via internet or pouch sent to the HQ. Each RO has a reporting department who is responsible for collecting the data, writing the reports and forwarding them either to the other regions or HQ.

Staff meetings are held but there was a feeling that further attention needs to be paid on developing the mechanisms to hold regular meetings inside the KRO and with the other ROs. The idea was expressed of the need to develop mechanism for regular visits of the staff from different regional office or cross monitoring systems, where communication and coordination is further improved among staff from different ROs. It was suggested that it would be useful to work out further communication means such as internet or telephone link between all the ROs so they could easily share experience, knowledge, information and data about different projects.

Before writing a proposal and implementing the projects, KRO conducts assessment surveys. It also contacts the community Shuras to help them identify their problems. A group of up to 7 Shuras are involved in the project planning and implementation stages. KRO CMs/ EWs²³ help form Community Based Organizations (CBOs) from these small Shuras. One representative is chosen as a focal point for communication and coordination with KRO. In projects such as Irrigation and Water Harvesting, where there is no formal community mobilizers, engineers and foremen are functioning as community mobilizers during the project implementation. HQ staff provides time to time trainings to these people on community participation and mobilization.

The project supervisors visit the project and report to KRO Director. Reports are also prepared and sent on monthly basis by the project staff. While paying the wages to the laborers, staff from the KRO visit the site and get information about developments or problems in the project. Sometimes, due to temporary nature of their employment in the ROs, some regional staff reflects that they are more concerned about their individual projects and targets. Therefore it was explained to the Researcher that they tend to view their performance as a key factor in continuing with a project thus ensuring sustainability of their jobs. For the regional staff it is difficult to visit the projects frequently mostly because of the distance and sometimes the security issues. The project sites are located in areas with minimum drive time of at least 3 to 4 hours²⁴. In absence of proper communication mechanisms, it was suggested that more frequent visit by the project supervisors, top management, and departmental staff would be desirable.

Information about developments taking place in different programmes and activities used to be shared through HQ published newsletter called Parmakhtag. Unfortunately the newsletter stopped publications due to work pressure on the department responsible for producing it.

Through the discussions I have had with the EWs at the Agriculture department, the Shuras appear to be well established and are willing to contribute physically towards their development, though their ability to contribute financially is limited. The EWs also

²² Part of Irrigation and Water Harvesting Programme

²³ In absence of Community Mobilizers/ Extension Workers, technical staff with relevant trainings from the HQ Social Mobilization Department, carry the community mobilization works

²⁴ Except projects such as Vocational Training Centre and Youth Development Programme

state that the same source informed us that there is a Shura in every village of the district ADA works. The mobilization and organization of Shuras is aimed at creating a sustainable social infrastructure at the grassroots level that may help accelerate reconstruction and rehabilitation in Afghanistan.

It is difficult to establish mobile connections especially in the networks peak hours, besides some projects are outside mobile coverage zones and if anything urgent in the project site the only way to communicate with the regional office is to come to the city by their transportation means. For instance some days before consultant's visit to the site, one manager while on his way to the office from Daman project site lost his way and spent many hours driving around the mountains despite security and other issues. He finally managed to find his way but if there was some communication means he could easily sought help from KRO. Despite that a good number of staff have access to mobiles, it is unavailable to the rest. It is expensive for other staff to buy or use mobiles themselves. Hence communication between the all staff in absence of mobile telephones is very difficult.

There is an issue of security while using the Codan Radio systems²⁵ especially in KRO vehicles, otherwise it is a good source of communication with any places on the world, cost approximately US\$5,000 and provides great communication facilities.

Staff in the KRO need IT training and motivation to use the computer more frequently²⁶. They also need to think of the Internet as an integral part of their work for the research, information and their capacity building, not only as entertainment means.

For the delivery of the pouch, staff are assigned on adhoc basis. Possibly more work could be done on this aspect of this system where one person or more people are responsible to carry out this work. At the moment the systems are a bit slow and sometimes unreliable.

Internet is used mostly for the email communication with the HQ. Other than that it is idle most of the time mainly because of technical problems and lack of training to the staff. The internet has the capacity for connection to minimum of five computers.

In Kandahar publications such as Civil Society (MADANI JAMIAH) published in Kabul, Parmakhtag published by ADA, Toloh a weekly magazine, Shkullah published by Benawa Society, Kandahar, UNHCR/UNAMA News bulletin, are available for ADA staff. UNHCR/ UNAMA News Bulletin give more comprehensive information from security to prices and from aid operations to information on the influx of refugees. It is available on monthly basis.

The present Intercom telephone system is not enough to cover the entire department. It has 8 telephone lines and KRO has 9 departments excluding door, kitchen and other staff who need to be contacted on regular basis. Digital phones are available in different part of Kandahar city except areas where KRO main is located.

Staff gets initial project information about their projects through proposals and initial joint meeting/ workshop held by HQ and KRO staff on implementation of the new projects.

²⁵ Please refer to page 10, paragraph 2, The security issues with the Codan Antenna

²⁶ This includes Internet

Reports are good way of information on the progress of activities to the project, KRO and HQ staff. In the past a couple of workshops on Agriculture have also been conducted by some international organizations and universities to the Partner NGOs.

ARIC has a mobile library in the KRO, which contains a good number of resources which is updated regularly by ARIC main office in Kabul. Other than that there are hardly any other sources of information on Agriculture, except outdated information/ material and practical work carried out by staff in the field.

Sectoral coordination and cooperation, especially on Agriculture, in absence of a proper coordinating body is a major problem in Kandahar. There are hardly any sectoral coordinating meetings of the aid organizations operation in the province so they share and communicate their activities and future plans. A coordinating body can create a mechanism to hold regular sector related meetings.

For the proposed Web-based Resource Centre, trained extension workers are needed so they contact Shuras/ CBOs²⁷, hold workshops, seminar and share the available resources. There are 6 extension workers in the Agriculture department, they are well trained in Agriculture, but they need regular trainings and workshop for continuous capacity building. Farmers and the communities need information related to the practical problems in the field of agriculture e.g. improved seeds, DAP, UREA, the soil problems, absence of phosphorus, nitrogen and potassium, information on drought, its mitigation, how to manage the rain water etc. Extension workers are used as the bridge between the community and KRO. They have their base in KRO but frequently travel to the field and are in touch with the communities through Shuras. Shuras in every district or project site are very good source of information distribution and sharing. Mechanisms need to be developed by the Resource Centre so communities' feedback is also included in the process. The communication with the community should be interactive. Material available in the Resource Centre can also be communicated through the Radio and TV stations available in Kandahar. It would be a great idea to broadcast a radio station for the Farmers and share the material from the Resource Centre through this station.

4. Information: How do people get information?

Like its development process over the last three years, Afghanistan's existing communication systems have favored those living in and around the capital city of Kabul. Today, close to 300 publications are registered with the Afghan Ministry of Information and Culture. They include Newspapers, Magazines, News Bulletins etc. Majority operates in or around Kabul while other Afghan cities and towns have their own modest publications often in the form of magazines.

Comparing the diversity of the publications, not more than 20% of the interviewees read any of those publications. The reasons given are problems such as access points especially for the Newspapers, lack of time, lack of good material and resources in these publications.

²⁷ Extension Workers prefer working with the community in the field, e.g. in an agriculture field or school etc.

After years of war and political turmoil, the country and its people are politically very aware. Afghans believe that information and news is broadcasted according to political developments internationally. They also believe that broadcasting agencies in Afghanistan are under some sort of pressure where they can't broadcast the real news. All of the news broadcasts are based on facts, but facts based on someone else's policy.

Afghanistan is still steeped in a radio culture as the majority of the population, particularly in the remote rural regions, depends on radio for news and information. 80 percent of the staff interviewed are using the Radio as media to access the information. As one staff member explained, it is reliable, easy to carry, cheap and habitually over the years of war, people are used to listening to it. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the Voice of America (VOA) and the state-run Radio Afghanistan tops the list with almost 70 percent Radio listeners. Radio Afghanistan has 17 stations all over Afghanistan while BBC is now broadcasting in 16 Afghan cities, both providing quality broadcasts around the clock. Other radio stations such as Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Radio Azadi (Kandahar), Radio Kilid, Radio Arman and some other international stations are coming next. Most of these stations are providing broadcasting in Afghan local languages and provided the only reliable sources of news and information during the country's 25 year conflict. 30 percent of staff interviewed in Kabul are listening to Radio Killid, a Radio station broadcasted by an Afghan NGO, DHSA. Arman FM is the country's commercial station. It attracts around 60 per cent of young listeners in Kabul.

By contrast, the development of television in Afghanistan has been slow. According to most estimates, only one-third of the Afghan population has access to television. 70 percent of staff interviewed watch TV. With USAID funding, Arman FM has started Afghanistan's first independent commercial TV channel, Tolo TV. Other Channels accessed are TV Farah, Kandahar TV, Khyber TV, accessible to digital viewers. Staff in provinces such as Farah has access to TV, but Farah doesn't have any Radio broadcast for the province, but other Radio channels such as BBC, VOA/ Radio Ashna, Radio Sulha (Peace) is broadcasted. In most of the country, internet connections, computer services, TV and Radio stations are dependent on electricity, which is a problem so far for the Afghan government to resolve. In absence of electricity it is difficult to access the media sources.

Most of the staff interviewed gets information from HQ e.g. proposals and other relevant technical information. Training workshops are other source for sharing information. There is little argument over the potential advantages to be gained through using the Internet. 40 percent of staff interviewed, in the HQs have searched the news sites in the last one week or for access to information. The very idea of trust in Afghan context is very complex and after the decades of war it is alien to most people. Web search engines are themselves complex and hard to understand. Most of the staff interviewed seems not to totally trust their information sources.

Most of the project staff however hardly have access to any source of information while in the project site. Sometimes Guest Houses both in the regions and HQ are good source sharing information because colleagues are traveling to the project sites or other offices very often.

30 percent of the staff interviewed reported that they have received general information from relatives, friends and neighbors, official meetings, consortium, email distribution

lists. Less than 5 percent access their information through reading the Newspapers such as Anis, Irada, Kabul Times, Ghurzang, Afghan Millat, The News (Pakistan). A subsection of CHA publishes Sabah Magazine which is widely read in different part of Afghanistan including Farah region and attracts many readers. 60 percent of the staff interviewed expressed that that they read technical books and publications related to their field of interest.

Literally 90 percent of the interviewees expressed interest on any types of news about Afghanistan. After years of war, lack of free media, it is very much enjoyable for them to hear about the reconstruction and developments processes taking place in Afghanistan. They mainly think about the political developments and government, future of the country, economical perspectives, security issues etc.

TV programmes in Kandahar are also good way of communication with the communities. A good number of people have access to the TV. In the past Kandahar had an hour or two TV channels with Agriculture related programmes, called Kirana Aw Maldari (Agriculture and Animal Husbandry) they were very informative sources. Interestingly a very famous producer and presenter of Afghan TV's programme on Agriculture is presently working with the ADA HQ.

5. Web-based Resource Centre:

This research found that Partner NGOs in the last two years benefited greatly from their use of the Internet through reduced transmission costs, access to new and relevant information, and greater contact with their own field sites and partner organizations. It is expected that the role of the internet and e-learning would change further over the years in Afghanistan. Staff of the Partner NGOs are also increasingly looking to use it to support their current aid work practices and they already realize that online resources are quick and easy to update, unlike printed resources, and do not require a tutor at all times. The role of technology not only in the Livelihood Support, Rural Development and Agriculture but also in other fields should be to enhance the work that aid workers are already doing. The access to online resources is also far more easier than the printed ones which are difficult to access because of transportation and other means between different ROs and the printed resources.

5.1 Barriers to the Implementation of Web-based Resource Centre:

Staff of the Partner NGOs are generally used to finding, adapting and using any number of different resources in their aid practices, but for some the online resources is not so easy to use. The Partner NGOs surveyed 50 percent have only one computer with Internet connectivity within their offices. Literally 0 percent of the Partner NGOs field sites were connected with either email or Internet. 35 percent reported having field sites without any means of direct voice or data transmission and communication systems. The Partner NGOs have access to the internet, but 30 percent of HQ or ROs reported that they either seldom or never used the Internet²⁸ that was available to them. This presents great challenges and restrictions in terms of the frequency with which the Web-based Resource Centre can be accessed and material be distributed to the target communities.

²⁸ Internet, not the email

5.1.1 Organizational Culture:

There appears to be the need to bring changes to the organizational culture towards the use of Internet and Web-based resources. It is still the culture in the Afghan NGOs that when a staff is using the internet for work and researches purposes, during the office hours, their work is scrutinized. Most think that the staff use the internet for the entertainment purposes. Embracing the internet resources needs a combination of organizational planning, in which staff's enthusiasm and acceptance of the new learning method can be enhanced.

Besides some of the Partner NGOs staff does not feel confident using the electronic resources in their work practices. This lack of confidence is mainly caused by their inexperience using the search engines and the result they get after internet search. The challenge is for the Partner NGOs to encourage and train their staff to fully understand the additional benefits that using electronic materials and resource can bring to the organization. From the responses of those interviewed, there are indications that the Partner NGOs are operating the internet with a learn-as-you-do attitude. The reality, as one staff of the Partner NGO remarked, is that a lack of experience with and exposure to the technology leaves many staff in the position where they, *only heard about the facilities the Internet can provide*. This study however, only flips through some of these problems and further research is required to fully explore how Partner NGOs are able to benefit from their use of the Internet.

I) CHA:

CHA uses the IT resources more effectively than most of the Afghan NGOs. Majority of work in the office is through the use of computer technology. It is an accepted norm not only in CHA but also in other places that the younger generation uses the internet resources more frequently than their older peers. The problem is however that the use of computer and internet is limited to the Offices, mainly due to technical problems such as the electricity. It is difficult to access the internet at home because of high internet connection costs. Staff believes that they are too preoccupied with the daily work, and would probably find little chance to visit the Web-based Resource Centre. In Kabul, however, people who have access to the digital telephone line can access the internet via prepaid internet cards.

Staff spends an average of four hours using the computer and the internet/ email while in the office. Internet is used for sending and receiving emails, internal communication, MSN Messenger, technical and specific searches, news sites such as BBC, CNN and others. The use of English or local languages while surfing the internet depends, but majority staff don't have problems using the internet sources in English. Managers at the HQ have access to a laptop and can use it at home as well.

Staff both at the HQ and FRO prefer the material at the Resource Centre to be available in local (Dari/ Pushtoo) languages as well. But the material needs to be professionally translated.

There are some restrictions such as Firewalls software that do not allow staff to use Web-cameras or microphones. Staff at HQ and some ROs communicate through the

MSN messenger, but Firewall blocks the web-cam and microphone access. Imposing restrictions for access to these technologies are criticized by some staff, they suggest activating the monitoring systems instead, to monitor staff's access to different sites.

II) ADA:

Computer and IT is widely used both in the HQ and ROs. Staff both at HQ and KRO uses the email to communicate with international partners. However use of the Internet for local communication is not as high as the external ones. For the staff email is a very convenient mode of communication, effective in transmitting documents at lower costs than other technologies. Sending and receiving of attached documents are sometimes problematic for the staff in the regions. Quality training is required to tackle these and other IT related issue. Almost 60% of staff work is carried through the use of the computers. Staff is skilled in MS Office and Excel, other MS software such as Access or PowerPoint is rarely used.

To various degrees, documents, reports, and general information searches from around the world are being undertaken by the staff using the Web. Indications from the interviews are that, no matter what the frequency of use is within the organization, the Web's presence is an important one for the staff. For example, one staff from the HQ reported he regularly gives presentations in the different meetings and to his fellow staff members on diverse, development-related topics that he discovers and learns of through the Internet. 80 percent of staff reported that they have hardly any time to use the internet. The use of internet is on adhoc basis. Most of the staff suggests systems so they can do their routines through internet, they believe that it dramatically increases their work speed. There is a positive desire for the web site but proper use of the site will require training.

For not using the internet and websites staff generally give the excuses such as being *too busy to use the internet, I hardly find time to search the internet, lack of IT skills*. Not only in ADA but most of the organizations the problem is the organizational culture for use the internet during office hours for different purposes. Younger generation usually access the English sites, and hardly use any website in local languages. In order to avoid misuse of internet during the office hours, Partner organizations need to develop a policy and guideline for the use of internet.

5.2 Infrastructure:

The last the two and half decades of war and insurgencies have taken a heavy toll on the development and welfare of Afghanistan. The poor social and technological infrastructure existing in the country is primarily due to such instability. Under these circumstances, the challenge for development organizations, and indeed, for the Partner NGOs are immense. Access to the internet is a problem not only for the regions but also in the HQs of the Partner NGOs. Even if the internet is available in some of the ROs, the large number of users and the limited number of computers connected to the internet (One computer in a RO) has stretched internet infrastructure and their offices expect the to keep within technological and budgetary constraints. The internet networking platforms are still not used in the ROs to solve this problem. Most of the field sites are isolated from telecommunication infrastructure; staff must rely on a variety of information

delivery mechanisms to maintain contact with each other, including personal visits, messages, and delivery of mail and documents using drivers and visitors.

While Partner NGOs involved in this study have adopted the Internet as a means of communicating between their headquarters and other organizations, less than half have extended those communication tools to their Regional offices, and almost none to their project/ field sites. The reasons for this were not researched in the survey, but may be related to budget restrictions, as well as staff unfamiliarity with basic computer technology. In cases where field sites are out of range for telephone lines, there is a need to explore and promote the use of email through HF radio to bring them into contact with their headquarters.

I) CHA:

CHA has internet network, email, website and the MSN messenger services. The internet is available to most of the staff in the HQ. High internet connection prices, access to digital telephone lines, electricity are the problems which prevents staff to use the internet at home. It is also very expensive to access to the net at home. Digital telephone or internet cards to access the net is also very expensive. The access to the net is sometimes limited to a person in a department. It is ideal if a computer with the internet connection placed in the hall or another suitable place for all staff use. During the break hours, the Power Generator is switched off, meaning there is no internet connectivity during the breaks. Also ways need to be sought to upgrade the internet system for greater speed.

In FRO there are ten computers in use. Health, Agriculture, Administration is the frequent internet users. Because there is only one computer with the internet connection and that computer belongs to the RM, most of the time it is busy. Apparently the system doesn't allow more connection with the present equipments. Health department has large operations in FRO and need to be in touch with the HQ and other regions and they need internet connection, so does the Administration department.

Some departments including Agriculture do not have access to the computer mainly because of the budgetary issues. This is despite a great deal of need for a computer in these departments for writing reports, computerizing the data about the project in different districts. They have to write and records manually. Without a computer and internet access, resources and materials from the Web-based Resources Centre are hard to get to either Agriculture department or the communities.

People with the technical expertise on electronics and specially the computer are hardly available in Farah. Even for a very minor problem, the computers need to be sent out of the province either to Kabul and sometimes even to other countries. It would be ideal that each region have an IT person to sort out technical issues.

Majority of staff have not used the internet pages for the purpose of research which is a great challenge for the proposed Web-based Resource Centre proper use. Admin is supporting other departments in their daily operations and so does with their computer related works, e.g. sending and receiving emails, drafting letters etc .

II) ADA:

At the HQ, Information Communication Technologies Department (ICTD) has developed a wireless system which provides internet connection without being connected to cables. There are two sets of connection, a wireless and a cable connection. The access point through a wireless card inside the user computers provides the internet connection. At the moment it is only internet networking, but work is underway to develop a server which could share data and information. Most of the departments have internet connection through this system. NEDA is the internet service provider for ADA. Besides the ICTD is in the process of developing a File Transfer Protocol (FTP) site where different departments located in different office buildings can use this system and access all the information and email systems. Also plans are that networking be expanded to the Regional Offices. The internet connection already created communication facilities with the HQ and ROs. In the past all the documents and mail were suppose to be delivered in person which was time consuming and were a security risk to the people carrying them.

KRO have the possibility of connecting to five computers with their available server. Despite access to the internet some staff has not used the internet yet. It is three months that KRO have activated the internet, but so far only one computer is connected to the net. Internet is used to communicate with HQ. It would be a good idea to have a network connection and a server need to control how do people use the internet and also for solving some small software/ hardware problems through the network. The capacity of the present internet can be extended to even 8, but with 5 computers connected to the internet this promotes the best use of speed and downloading capacity. Sometimes internet connection is down and even there are problems with the internet provider's staff capacity to handle the problems. It is hard to find qualified IT people in Kandahar. At the moment the use of the internet in the KRO is bound to urgent reports or emails only. Agriculture department in the KRO does not have access either to computer or the internet.

During the survey 70 percent of staff reported that their primary motive for obtaining Internet connectivity was related to the need to transmit information to and communicate with other organizations. Email is viewed as the fastest, easiest and most reliable way to transmit documents to overseas donors and maintain communications with other agencies. It is viewed as faster and cheaper than regular post, courier, or fax transmissions. Lesser staff expressed that their reason for their internet access was to have greater access to information. Hence for proper use of Web-based Resource Centre mechanisms needs to be developed so staff use the internet to increase their access to the e-resources as well as to build up the Resource Centre itself.

5.3 Internet and Computer Skills:

The capacity of the staff in IT differs from one Partner to another and from one office to another but the computer skills in the regions exceeds not more than 30 percent of the staff. Most of the staff in the regions need to be brought up to a base level of competence in their overall IT skills. In the HQs it can be up to 70 percent and this is mostly concentrated on the computer skills, not the internet. Majority of the staff are not used to electronic and online resources and need guidance on how to incorporate the use of internet into their daily work as effectively as possible.

Parallel to the launch of this Web-based Resource Centre, there is a need for organization and departmental-wide plans and strategies to guide users in Agriculture

and other departments using the electronic materials. Staff need specific training to help them get the most out of their electronic resources according to these plans and strategies.

The Web-based Resource Centre needs to have a feedback system in itself so every user can share their ideas about the materials and also information available. The social workers can play a very important work in sharing material from this centre to the community. Farmers are mostly illiterate and providing them with the forms, charts and reports are not totally getting the message across. If information and resources are also provided via videos or resource persons explaining the material, then the farmers can best utilize the resources.

I) CHA:

As far as training of the human resource in the internet is concerned, the ISPs have a responsibility to provide their clients with the training and the tools that are necessary to operate their Internet systems effectively and efficiently. All of the ISPs in Afghanistan normally have good customer services and training when new clients register with them, yet the comments of many staff appears that the quality and quantity of training offered to new users of internet systems is not sufficient. The degree of training provided to staff both at the HQ and FRO may need to be reassessed and improved upon. If staff are unable to perform basic operations with their internet and email services, they are missing out the benefits that the Web-based Resource Centre or any other internet page can offer them. Mechanisms needs to be developed so there is continuous trainings, meetings, regular updated of the information in the Resource Center's website.

Until staff use the internet it is difficult to know their barriers. It is very common to hear about the positive sides to the internet but people hardly know what those positive sides are, they tell you about their fantasies about the internet, which are only sometimes really fantasies. Some staff widely use the email system to communicate with the other people outside the organizations. While surfing the net, they use the Yahoo than Google. The perception is that there is no need to read the Persian/ Dari site, because most of the Persian/ Dari news broadcasted here in Afghanistan are exact copies of the major news broadcasting sites. Staff needs training on how to conduct internet searches since searching through Google, Yahoo or other search engines need proper know how, for instance searching a topic without properly putting specific letters results in finding many irrelevant internet pages. For the purpose of the Resource Centre, especially attention needs to be paid to agriculture and social mobilization department who not only need computers but also trainings on IT.

II) ADA:

At the HQ, 70 percent of staff knows how to use the internet, the 30 percent have either language, IT skills problems, not willing or don't have access to the computer and internet. In KRO the percentage of people know how to use the internet is 5, despite that the use of computer is widespread; the problem with the IT knowledge is widespread too. Most of the staff doesn't have the proper know how and knowledge of use of internet programmes. Only one person in Kandahar region knows how to properly use the internet. The use of MS Word and Excel software are common.

For staff with less internet and IT skills, searching the internet is very frustrating, because it results a very general and unrelated material and despite looking for some particular information it is difficult to find related topics. They need to go through pages and pages and sometimes end up frustrated finding nothing of a kind of information they need. This causes them to stop searching the net again, instead of learning how to search for material properly. They sometimes blame that websites provide only theoretical knowledge and it is difficult to find practical knowledge, because finding case studies is more difficult on the internet. Staff is constrained by time to participate in the regular training programmes, if held. It is better to have a person responsible for training on the job. Every staff is very interested to learn the internet and accessing different types of information and news.

For getting the Web-based Resource Centre messages across, visual and audio presentations of the materials, such as TV and Projectors and audio can be very useful. After developing the Resource Centre online, the staff both at the HQ and ROs of the Partner NGOs needs comprehensive training on the technical material of the centre itself, with the specific focus on the Social Mobilizers/ Extension Workers. The Extension Workers and Social Mobilizers can be well trained to get the information from the Resource Center's Website and then deliver it to the community. Presenting the data to the community through posters and pictorial messages are also good way of getting the messages across

Steps Forward

6. Web-based Resource Centre

6.1 Partner NGO staff benefiting from the use of the Internet:

Generally speaking, both Partner NGOs seem to try to integrate the internet into their daily programming. They also appear to be benefiting from the access to new and relevant information, through the internet/ email. Even staff interviewed who reported minimal use of the internet, produced documents that had been downloaded from the Web for their own benefit. Prior to their access to the internet, many of these staff relied upon publications from their own resource centers that were as many as twenty years old to assist them in their programmes.

6.2 Internet Availability:

In cases where field sites are out of range for telephone lines, there is a need to explore and promote the use of email through HF radio to bring them into contact with their headquarters. Sometimes during the break hours, the Power Generator is switched off, meaning there is no internet connectivity during the breaks.

6.3 Internet Restrictions:

There are some restrictions such as Firewalls software that do not allow staff to Web-cameras or microphones. Staff at HQ and some ROs communicated through the MSN messenger, but Firewall blocks the web-cam and microphone access. It is ideal if a computer with the internet connection placed in the hall or another suitable place for all

staff use. Also ways needs to be sought to upgrade the internet system for greater speed.

6.4 Language:

Staff both at the HQ and ROs prefer the material at the Resource Centre to be available in local (Dari/ Pushtoo) languages as well. But the material needs to be professionally translated.

6.5 Computers available:

50 percent of offices covered in this research have just one computer available in their offices with internet connectivity. More information is needed to ensure that especially ROs are equipped with the tools required to handle the resources from the Web-based Resources Centre efficiently and effectively.

6.6 Internet Means Email:

Email is the main use for the internet in most of the office visited. While most of the HQ and ROs of the Partner NGOs visited have access to the internet, 70 percent reported having had either very limited use of the Internet²⁹, or none at all mainly because of their work load. If CaBARP or other donor agencies are to assist NGOs in acquiring Internet facilities and equipment, they should do so in a way that does not overburden the staff with more work. In the ROs it is necessary to have two or more computers to enable its staff to benefit from the resources available through internet and maintain their current work levels.

6.7 Zero percent Internet Connection with Project Offices/ Sites:

Both Partner NGOs reported having project offices³⁰, 0 percent have project offices with email or internet connectivity. Furthermore, at least one Partner NGO reported that their project sites/ office had very limited voice or data transmission equipment available for their staff. It is expected that through greater use of their own HQ systems, Partner NGOs will begin to realize the benefits of having connectivity with their project offices/ sites.

6.8 Internet Training:

The most common difficulty associated with the use of the internet was the sending and receiving of attached files over email and a lack of awareness of the internet tools available to facilitate easier access to information e.g. search engines.

General accessibility to the computers with connectivity was also mentioned as a problem for the staff. This may be related to a number of circumstances. Firstly, as 50 percent of the Partner NGOs had only one computer with connectivity in the office, it is obvious that conflicts will emerge when one individual wishes to use the Internet while

²⁹ Internet not email

³⁰ In Kandahar ADA have a field office for its Water Harvesting and Irrigation Programme while CHA has different field offices in Farah including one for Livelihood Support Programme

another wishes to continue the administrative work being done on that same computer. This is not a major problem, in a sense that in both KRO and FRO, require only cables to connect the internet to the computers³¹.

7. Web-based Resource Centre and the Target Communities:

Most of the times communities served by Partner NGOs lack any communications technology to assist their interactions. In such cases, communication takes place through physical meetings e.g. Shuras, meetings held in person, or through messages delivered by the organization transportation or public transport. Thus, Partner NGOs and individuals, in the absence of telecommunications infrastructure such as telephones and internet, use whatever means available to deliver messages to their target communities.

Hence to deliver the end product to the target audience, the Resource Centre should be able to build Partner NGOs capacity using the internet as an information tool to assist target communities.

- Based on the interviews undertaken for this research, Partner NGOs appear able to make use of the Internet to benefit their target communities with information that is appropriate to their needs. While the policies and strategies are very important for the Partner NGOs to develop for using internet technologies, they need to encompass the dissemination of the information to target communities as well. As far as the ROs covered in this research, they were able to use email or downloaded material to forward information through extension workers/ community mobilizers or project staff. They should be trained so they could ensure that information dissemination is able to occur quickly and efficiently.
- Not only in delivering the material from Resource Centre, but Partner NGOs can also use the Internet to acquire information on appropriate technologies which can be used to assist rural communities for instance on alternative technologies, irrigation and water harvesting, health, which can then be presented to the target communities.
- In cases where it is difficult, securities or otherwise, it is also possible to take information that has been downloaded from email/ internet and has it taken either by car or other means to the farmers/ other communities. On the community's end, either Shuras, farmers or other, collect and store in hard copy format in the Shuras resource library, where available.
- As initial discussions taken place with the University of Kandahar, students at the University can be a good source of dissemination and participation in the process of Resource Centre. Especially the students of the Agriculture Faculty, can receive the downloaded material from the Resource Centre. Once they received the information they can help the Extension Workers/ Community Mobilizers in next steps to train the farmers and communities. Besides, Sayara³² provides many universities across the

³¹ FRO may need to change the internet hug as well

³² Sayara is an organizations, aims to promote a more effective use of the media and to strengthen the role of communication and information to support humanitarian and development initiatives.

country with either internet or the FM Radio stations, they can allocated time to for special programmes for the Resource Centre.

- We can reach a conclusion that the target communities are able to benefit from the Web-based Resource Centre, through the Partner NGOs use of the Internet and email. Despite that target communities, themselves, may not have Internet connectivity in the years to come, Partner NGOs are still able to disseminate the information acquired from the Internet to them for their own use.
- As far as the language of the Web-based Resource Centre is concerned, it obviously depends on the target communities and their language. While most of the staff in the ROs don't have any problem with the both local languages, English is sometimes a problem. Dari or Pushtoo for the RO staff is not a problem, it can have problems for the community, hence the material presented needs to be in language spoken in the communities.
- Finding professional people to continuously translate the material from English to the local language would be a barrier to the work of the Resource Centre, hence extra attention needs to be paid in finding qualified technical translators.

8. Partner NGOs Capacity Building - Suggestions:

- Staff need to learn more about how to develop their skills in using the internet material in their own work. There are several online resources, such as online sites and trainings which are helpful for staff capacity development.
- There are staff in the organization with the IT know how. To avoid reinventing the wheel, these staff could share experiences, ideas and resources that they have created or used with the rest. This may be through an internet networking system or intranet, or through a page set up on the planned Web-based Resource Centre.
- Partner organizations could ensure that their staff keeps up to date with the key developments in e-learning. They could get regular updates from the CaBARP that are adding these updates and developments into their Resource Centre. It is better to have regular workshops, seminars and meetings in which staff of the Partner organizations can get involved in which will help to raise their awareness of what is available and updated in the Web-based Resource Centre.
- There are difficulties relation to limited human resources who have expertise in IT, lack of investment in infrastructure e.g. Computer and IT equipment, the high cost of access to Internet, electricity, the lack of proper mechanisms for dissemination of information.

9. Communications & Coordination – Some Suggestions:

Partner organizations themselves could take a number of key actions to ensure that they can incorporate online learning resources into their work effectively.

- Partner organizations could work on developing an integrated information technology strategy and plan that meets the IT needs of their staff. This strategy-plan should encourage/ mentor staff to use technology in the management and delivery of their work.
- ADA and CHA have established a good relationship with the government and their donors but more efforts would be useful and needed to coordinate activities. There are a number of coordination bodies and sectorial groups in which both Partner NGOs are represented and are actively participating. However, this coordination and communication between the various participating organizations does not occur at the field level.
- The Partner NGOs building their communication infrastructure remain concentrated in their HQs. ROs and rural areas are more or less cut off from the IT facilities. It would be useful for Partners to take into account ROs and target beneficiaries needs if financially and physically possible.
- Staff needs training. Some suggestions include: Computer skills, Internet/ email, Computer Network and general IT trainings. Relying on Administration staff that have expertise on IT, could be a solution to staff computer problems, but this solution is limited by the fact that it overburdens the Administration staff and it is not a long term solution. This problem will not be solved unless Partner NGOs set aside the necessary training and capacity building funds or seek assistance.
- For further improving the communication and coordination between the HQ and ROs, the HQ staff would be helped by developing a clear-cut plan of visits to the ROs and the field. Sometimes despite communication problems between the RO and the project sites, the regional and project managers visit the projects less than expected.. Due to busy schedules of regional staff, the HQ Management or Sectorial Heads would benefit with this plan since field staff need to be informed in advance. This would improve communication/coordination between various offices considerably.
- Staff from one RO seldom visit other regions to exchange ideas and share experiences. Likewise there are hardly any other chances or mechanism for the project staff to visit HQ and meet HQ staff, they need to go through long communication channels and their message is lost in translation! Trainings workshops, meetings can provide opportunities where staff from different regions could meet and discuss mutual interests with other ROs or HQ staff would be helpful.

10. NGO-Specific – Some Suggestions:

1) CHA:

- The MIS (Management Information System) at HQ is not developed enough to respond to the needs and demands of staff. The information/ data available in the systems are not adequate enough to meet different departmental needs. Despite that MIS personal is hired for particular ROs, the systems is not developed and the data

is not gathered in the system as expected. A study might be useful to help identify and solve the problem.

- Organization's website is up and running but hardly visited or updated either by staff or promoted outside the organization. A website is a very good source of information especially for marketing and fundraising of the Organization especially to the donor agencies. It would be useful if mechanisms could be developed to regularly update and promote this site.
- Pouch system is used for sending the paper work, undeliverable by the email or Radio messages. However, from ROs it takes up to a week or longer for the pouch to reach either HQ or other ROs. This is an issue common with most of the organizations operating in Afghanistan. Since mail delivery service providers, both air and ground, operate in Afghanistan, it might help to deliver the pouch via those services³³.
- It costs up to US\$ 3/ minute to use Thuraya/ Satellite phone, which is expensive. In Farah, other telephone services are also available e.g. the Farah Directorate of Ministry of Communication in the centre of the city which costs approximately US\$ 1.20/ minute to call any mobile network anywhere in Afghanistan.
- The internet facility is used by the most of the departments in FRO, quite often; however, except the FRM, no other computer has access to the internet. It is not that expensive to establish computer networking between computers and printers.
- FRO do not have an Intercom/ internal telephone system to communicate internally in the office. Staff usually goes to other departments in person. It is a waste of time and also keeps different departments less informed about each other; An Intercom might be a useful tool to solve this problem..

Sometimes the Administration Department is overburdened by project staff or other staff computer, communication or other extra works coming from other departments. This can cause delays both to the Admin and others assignments. It might be useful for Management to look into ways to solve this problem.

II) **ADA:**

Due to temporary nature of employment in the ROs, some regional staff are more concerned about their individual projects and targets. They view their performance as a key factor in continuing with a project thus ensuring sustainability of their jobs, probably not the whole operation of the RO. This is worth noting and while in itself, is not entirely a bad thing, it might be useful to look at other modes for incentive.

- The use of the internet and email systems in KRO is limited to one computer. It could be very useful to either develop a computer networking system for sharing

³³ For the delivery of the pouch, staff are assigned on adhoc basis. More work needs to be done on this aspect of this system where one person or more people are responsible to carry out this work. At the moment the systems a bit slow and sometimes unreliable.

internet, computer, printers or simply cables procured to connect computers to the internet hub.

- It would be desirable if the internet systems expanded to the other ROs. Some provinces where ADA has ROs, internet and email systems are available³⁴.
- HQ and ROs, like other aid agencies operating in Afghanistan have problems sending and receiving pouches³⁵.
- . ADA has worked hard to put up a website, it could be further developed, regularly updated and marketed to outsiders. Also ADA's magazine, Parmakhtag, is in great demand. It would be useful if it could be published again on a regular basis.
- It is desirable to work out further communication means such as internet or telephone link between all the HQ, ROs and project offices, so they could easily share experience, knowledge, information and data about different projects.
- Besides operation support, Admin department in different occasions is also providing computer support to other department and project staff. This overburdens this department³⁶.
- In the Regions, staff need IT training and motivation to use the computer more frequently. They also need to think of the Internet as an integral part of their work for the research, information and their capacity building. Internet is used mostly for the email communication with the HQ. Other than that it is idle most of the time mainly because of technical problems and lack of training to the staff.
- People with the technical expertise on electronics and specially the computer is hardly available in the regions. Even with very minor problems, the computers needs to be sent out of the province either to Kabul and sometimes even to other countries. It would be ideal if each region could have an IT person to sort out technical issues.
- TV programmes in Kandahar are also good way of communication with the communities. A good number of people have access to the TV. In the past Kandahar had an hour or two TV channels with Agriculture related programmes, called Kirana Aw Maldari (Agriculture and Animal Husbandry) they were very informative sources. Interestingly a very famous producer and presenter of Afghan TV's programme on Agriculture is presently working with the ADA HQ.

11. Conclusion

Novib through funding Oretechs conducted this research to achieve an understanding of the issues and challenges facing Partner NGOs on how a Web-based Resource Center could benefit staff, farmers and communities in large. It was also to focus on how the Partner NGOs are able to benefit from the use of the Internet. In addition, efforts were put on finding how the available resource and capacities in the partner NGOs could be shared with each other. This study was able to present initial evidence that Partner

³⁴ Jalalabad, Farah etc.

³⁵ Please refer to recommendations for CHA

³⁶ Please refer to recommendations to CHA

NGOs using Internet not only benefit themselves, but can also benefit the communities that they work with. This could be done by downloading and distributing information relevant to their target beneficiaries. Thus Partner NGOs are demonstrating that target communities, even without access to internet can acquire Internet-based information.

The material presented in this report is based on the comments, meetings, minutes of the meetings and observations during the interviews with the Partner NGO staff. It would be desirable that further work to be carried out on these topics touched during this report. This report is just a first step in understanding how information that is received through the Web-based Resource Centre Internet could flow within an organization and how that information could be shared with the target communities, who are meant to benefit from it, how communication takes place within the structure of the organization and resources available in Partner NGOs shared to benefit all.

ANNEX I

ToR for
Study on how people get information
Toward Producing a Rural Development Resource Centre

1. Background:

This ToR focuses on the CaBARP mandate to initiate a web-based resource centre situated in Kabul. It begins with an assessment of the actual demand for such a Resource Centre on Rural Development and Livelihood programming and tries to identify best ways for users to access relevant information. It also focuses on possible constraints to the real use of this Resource Centre and discusses the realistic practices to mitigate these communication constraints. Furthermore it provides an analysis of the actual utilization of all means of information e.g. internet, books, radio, TV etc and possible ways of promoting their availability to the audience. It also focuses on the way information is processed within different organizational structures.

2. Objective of the Services:

The main objective of the study on Producing a Rural Development Resource Centre is to take stock of how the target audience (Afghans) best want to receive their information, who are their trusted communicator, what form do they prefer to receive their information etc. It also provides tools to policy makers and organizations with available resources to enhance provision of these resources.

3. Scope of Work:

The study should focus on the target audience information needs, motivation and best practices. The target audience for this process is the 3 Afghan NGOs (ADA, CHA and AREA) partners both at the headquarter and field levels.

The study should find new ways of looking at how available resources are disseminated to larger, more popular audience too. Since it is out of scope of this study to focus on all field and project offices of these 3 Afghan NGOs, focal districts within three provinces, Kandahar, Ghore and Kabul are identified to be studied.

In particular this study will focus on:

a) Information:

- What sort of information does the audience need?
- What sort of information does the audience want?
- How do they get information now?
- Sources they trust?
- What are the barriers in accessing this information?
- What is their access to the internet? Does it require effort to get to a computer? Does it cost in terms of time and money (hidden costs)?

b) Information sharing within the Organization:

- How is it done? (If done at all)
- How information is shared from top to bottom vice versa?
- What are barriers in the organizational structure for flow of information?

c) Internet access:

- Describe target audience access to the internet:
 - Once a day
 - Once a Week
 - Once a Month
 - Not at all
- Are they comfortable accessing the internet?
- How and what they usually access through the internet? (discrete approach for getting this type of information)
- Do they usually access Dari, Pushtoo or English sites for collecting information?
- What are the barriers for them to get the information they want from the internet?
- Whether they want their information on a piece of paper?

4. Methodology:

The methodology employed will be participatory wherever possible. The consultant will seek tools to guide his research and will focus on those tools that assists in the involvement of the participants. Some possible tools include:

- A questionnaire that would simply serve as a guide to the overall line of questioning
- Focus group discussion with field staff etc.
- Participatory exercises with participants
- Hands on demonstration of internet capacities

The first task will be to involve the consultant working with the CBARP CTA to draw up a questionnaire detailing the questions to be examined, the work methodology and work schedule, (prep work). This will be discussed and agreed before the beginning of the study.

5. Consultant's Input:

It is expected that the study would require a total of 25 days. The task would be carried out by the Consultant. The Consultant should visit Kabul, Kandahar and Ghore provinces.

The consultant will report to the client (O-retechs) and will present the ToR and other relevant information before starting the substantive part of the work. The final report will be reviewed by the Client (O-retechs).

6. Reporting:

Report would be produced after commencement of the study. A draft final report would be produced (22nd January 2005) two days after completion of the services. The consultant/ researcher will provide hard and diskette copies of the final report in Word Processing Software.

ANNEX II
Proposed Itinerary and Persons Met

26/12	Sending CTA notes of the Thursday's meeting along with draft ToR
27/ 12	1. Prepare a questionnaire 2. Detail the work plan and time table 3. Select exercises (field tested)
28/12	Study of documents: 1. MDF capacity building plan 2. ADA, CHA, AREA: participants + organizations Visit: ADA, CHA, AREA HQs
29/12	Setup schedule: Head Office and field office Interviews Book Airfare
30/12	Meetings/ interviews with CHA HQ staff and study of documents
31/12	Off
01/01	Off
02/ 01	Continue Meetings/ interviews with CHA HQ staff and study of documents
03/01	Meetings with ADA HQ staff and study of documents
04/01	Continuous
05/01	Meetings with AREA HQ staff and field visit preparations (flight etc).
06/01	Departure for Kandahar – meetings with the ADA field staff
07/01	Continuous
08/01	Continuous
09/01	Continuous
10/01	Flight Back to Kabul
11/01	Revisit ADA office – debrief CTA
12/01	Departure for Farah – meetings with the CHA field staff
16/01	Departure for Kabul – meet CTA for debriefing
17/01	Revisit CHA HQ

18/01	Off ³⁷
19/01	Report Writing
22/ 01	Submitting the Final Report (To be finalized when the CTA return by February) ³⁸

³⁷ Plan to visit AREA was cancelled by Eng. Sakhi, AREA something

³⁸ It didn't materialize until 15 February

ANNEX III
Questionnaire for Research

Objectives:

1. Look at information needs vis-à-vis Resource Centre
2. Information flow – capacity building
3. How they get information on the internet

Life:

1. How do you get information (general)?
 - a. Radio (what?)
 - b. TV (what?)
 - c. Internet
 - d. Newspapers
 - e. Books
 - f. Market
 - g. Mosque
 - h. Shops
 - i. Shura
 - j. Gossip
2. Which source do you trust the most?
3. If you had a choice what would be your preferred way to get more information?
4. What sort of information do you need?

Internet:

1. Do you use computers?
2. How often and where?
3. Have you ever used the internet?
4. What do you look up on the Internet?
5. Do you read English, Dari, Pushtoo sites?
6. Do you visit BBC, CNN, Voice of America?

Work:

1. How do you get information about your work?
 - a.
 - b. Internet
 - c. Talking
 - d. Workshops
 - e. Reading
 - f. Books
 - g. Videos
2. How do you communicate with your boss?
3. How do you learn about your organization at all?
4. How does head office communicate their ideas to you?
5. How do you communicate your ideas to them?
6. What changes you suggest to improve communication systems within the structure?
7. Suggestions/ Recommendations?