

ICARDA News
INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH
IN THE DRY AREAS

P.O. Box 5466, Aleppo, Syria
Phone: (963-21) 2213433, 2213477, 2225112, 2225012
Fax: (963-21) 2213490, 2225105; E-mail: ICARDA@CGIAR.ORG

Computer and Biometric Services Unit/International Cooperation

ICARDA Afghanistan Office Gets Information Technology Upgrade

Aleppo, Syria (5 September): Communication in ICARDA's Kabul office was given a boost recently with the installation of a new local area network, linking the staff of four to one another and to the world beyond.

The office's communication capabilities are now on par with ICARDA's other outreach offices. Staff members can share electronic files easily, access shared network resources, such as printers, and can each access the Internet, to browse the web or send and receive web-based email. The office's software has also been upgraded to the Center's standard configuration, which includes protection against hackers and viruses.

The installation was done by Mr Colin Webster, Network Administrator, and Mr Michael Sarkisian, Senior Maintenance Engineer, members of ICARDA's Computer and Biometric Services Unit, who worked closely with their local colleague, Mr Ahmad Shah, in the Kabul office, 28-30 August.

The office occupies a two-storey building in the north of the city close to other aid and development agencies. It handles the on-site management of the ICARDA-led Future Harvest Consortium to Rebuild Agriculture in Afghanistan.

Kabul's land-line phone system was virtually destroyed by war, but the communication void has been filled by a cellular (GSM) phone service, mobile satellite phones, and direct-to-satellite Internet connections. In fact the Kabul office's rooftop satellite transmitter and receiver delivers a faster Internet connection—for email and web surfing—than would be available through a

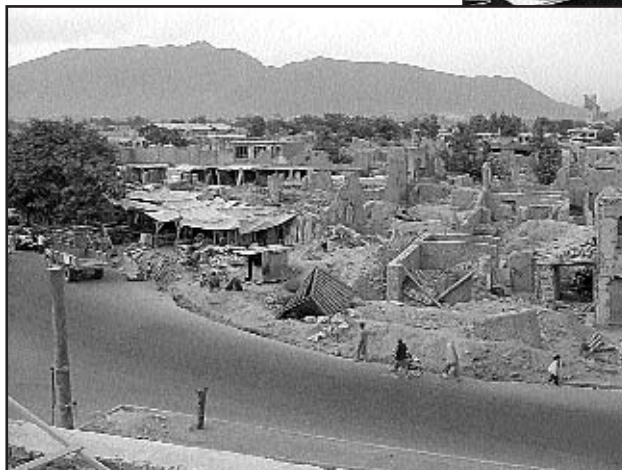
typical telephone dial-up connection, said Mr Webster in a briefing following his trip.

"They have a land-line system, but it was pretty much wrecked in the war. Now they've got cell phones, and satellite connections, so they've actually jumped one level of development," Mr Webster said.

About two-thirds of Kabul was



Above, Michael Sarkisian (left) and Colin Webster at work in ICARDA's Kabul Office.



Two-thirds of Kabul was wrecked by war.

demolished, yet the city functions, with people living and working amid the rubble. There is an obvious military presence—helicopters patrol the airspace around the airport and international security personnel patrol the streets—but the mood is positive and the people are friendly as they go about rebuilding their city. The northern section of the city shows few signs of war.

"To be honest, I didn't feel uncomfortable, or particularly uneasy. I was actually surprised at how much was intact, and the shops have a wide range of products," Mr Webster said.

The ICARDA team purchased some equipment en-route in Dubai, but was able to purchase much of

what was needed, including the network hub, from suppliers in Kabul.

Still, working in Kabul remains a challenge, and the office relies on a gas-powered generator in order to work through the many hours a day when the city's electricity supply is cut. And personal security remains a concern, especially in the countryside.

The Future Harvest Consortium trucked thousands of tonnes of improved seeds into Afghanistan in time for last spring's planting, and is now working with farmers in-country to ensure that sufficient high quality seed is produced in time for the next planting. Work is also being carried out to improve livestock, vegetable, and fruit production.