

**COMMUNITY CONNECTION, E-LEARNING,
AND ENTREPRENEUR SUPPORT (CCELES) CENTERS
IN AFGHANISTAN – AN OUTLINE
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Background

Electronic connectivity, using mobile and broadband technology, is providing new opportunities to many millions of people. This trend is especially important in developing countries, where new connectivity services can contribute significantly to economic and social development, and to the building of stable, peaceful societies. The CEGHS initiative was founded to assist this process, and is currently focusing much of its attention on Afghanistan. There, the CEGHS founding partners, CHI and IRSS, have joined with other organizations to plan the establishment of broadband-enabled Community Connection, E-Learning, and Entrepreneur Support (CCELES) centers across the country.

The CCELES Concept

The concept of establishing CCELES centers builds on work by various organizations to bring the benefits of broadband connectivity to communities in developing countries. Informed by that work, the CEGHS group has developed a plan for deployment of CCELES centers in Afghanistan, beginning with several pilot projects. The plan reflects five key points. First, trends in technology are steadily reducing the cost of making Internet-linked computers accessible to communities in urban and rural Afghanistan. Second, combining a range of functions in a community-based center can achieve economies of scale and provide revenue streams that allow the center to become financially self-sustaining. Third, the process of engaging a community to establish and operate a center can enhance community cohesion and create new opportunities for cooperation. Fourth, operating many CCELES centers under the umbrella of a nation-wide program could achieve substantial economies of scale, ensure the quality, breadth, and reliability of service, and ensure that each center serves the public interest. Fifth, vocational and other skills developed through the centers could enhance human capacity in many areas, including the operation of a CCELES center, thus opening up new career and entrepreneurial pathways in a self-reinforcing loop.

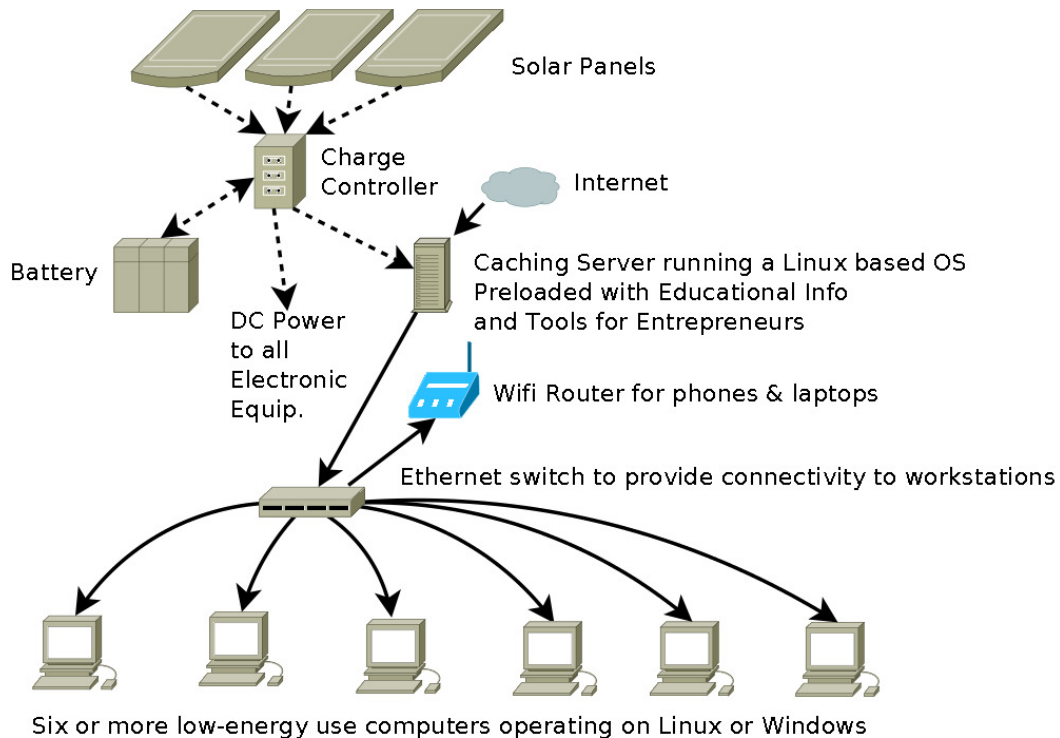
Guided by these considerations, the CEGHS group intends to work with various partners in Afghanistan to establish CCELES centers. These centers will be implemented on a flexible franchise model. Each center will operate under a franchise from the nation-wide “umbrella” program, which will support the center in many ways, including helping it to meet high standards. This arrangement will facilitate economies of scale and the rollout of many high-quality services. For each center, a local organization will be the franchisee, and will play several crucial roles. This organization will be responsible for engaging the community in the establishment and operation of the center, and for liaising with local government and other major stakeholders.

Flexible application of the franchise will allow a particular center to focus on delivering a selected range of services to a selected population. The range of services offered at that center could expand over time, responding to community needs and priorities.

If all service options available in the franchise model were implemented, a CCELES center could ultimately combine the capabilities of:

- (i) an Internet café (email, web-searching, etc.);
- (ii) a business center (video-conferencing, word processing, printing, etc.);
- (iii) an educational center (language and literacy classes, health and hygiene classes, computer/connectivity training, vocational training, etc.);
- (iv) a community center (meetings to discuss community needs, support groups for vulnerable populations, etc.);
- (v) an entrepreneurs' support center (facilitated contacts with mentors and partners, access to market information, financial and accounting services, video archiving of oral contracts, etc.);
- (vi) an agricultural extension center (advice about farming practices, plant and animal health, etc.);
- (vii) a project management center (training, mentoring, and technical support for local managers, facilitation of remote monitoring and technical support, etc.); and
- (viii) a base for rural health workers (training, facilitated interactions with call centers and hospitals, etc.).

Technical Components of a Typical CCELES Center



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