DOTGazette

Automating the Taxman's Workplace in Pakistan



By
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Revenue mobilization through levy of taxation is a difficult proposition in the best of times. Given an extremely narrow base, very poor tax consciousness, a large- and growing- informal sector and endemic corruption- especially endemic corruption-, collecting tax revenue can be a nightmare.

Worldwide, whenever people pay taxes willingly, usually, they do so not because they are enamored of the State in which they are citizens, but because they are fearful of the consequences of default. True there are those who are genuinely desirous of meeting their legal obligation to pay tax on the income they earn (income tax) and the goods they purchase (sales tax). But by and large, the great majority pay tax reluctantly- and that too only when they think that the state machinery charged with assessment and collection of tax has what it takes to levy tax correctly and enforce collection of that tax should that be necessary. When the perception is otherwise- as unfortunately happens all too often- default can be commonplace- to the chagrin of the exchequer.

One need not conduct elaborate research to come to the conclusion that automation has revolutionized the post industrial revolution workplace and with it there has been a huge surge in productivity and efficiency. So what exactly is 'automation' and what good can it achieve in the FBR?

Very simply put, when machines enter the workplace- be the workplace a grubby factory floor or a gleaming hi-tech I.T. establishment- you have automation. Machines of course are nothing new. They were there in the ancient world, in medieval times, in the middle ages in short, they have been there ever since the human brain acquired the capacity to 'short cut' the work process so as to complete the process quicker and to greater effect. The ancient water wheel is a machine and it is able to lift water from considerable depths and put it in a channel much, much faster and in far greater volume than what a number of human beings can possibly achieve, unaided. The siege tower used by Roman armies to such telling effect in scaling high fortifications was also a machine. So was the slingshot with which David felled Goliath.

By taking over the work done by man singly or in a group or team, and by doing that work much faster and with much greater effect, machines have become 'force multipliers.' And at no time has the force multiplication been more pronounced than in the age of the micro chip and micro processor.

Today, the silicon chip is ubiquitous and omni present and it would be no exaggeration to say that it dominates the workplace. The P.C., Xerox copier, laser printer, optical scanner, networking, switch-boards and switching systems,- including 'intelligent' program-mable switches- servers, the internet, video conferencing, fax machine, high density digital data storage, 'robots'- what have you, all are 'chip progeny' spawned in the digital age.

The modern workplace and versatile, electro mechanical machines are synonymous. For the tax assessor and collector, automation has given a whole new dimension to the drudgery normally associated with what they do.

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FBR PAKISTAN

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DOT Gazette

EDITORIAL

The February issue of the DOT Gazette coincides with the cold wave sweeping throughout the country. The chilling cold weather and accompanying winds however, have not hindered the flow of activities being undertaken at this Directorate. Be it the training of the support staff or the future planning for enlargement of DOT's sphere of activities, the Directorate has remained committed to its objectives of imparting quality training to the entire FBR workforce.

During the month of January DOT initiated a series of training programs for the support staff of RTO Lahore on the directives of HRM Wing, FBR. The introduction of automation and information technology for performance of jobs specific to reform units has highlighted the need to train the support staff in the needed computer skills and technology. The first batch comprising of 30 trainees completed their three weeks training on 22nd January. The next batch of training commenced on 28th January and shall continue till 16th February. The training module comprises of basic computer concepts, Windows, M.S. Office and use of internet.

The Member HRM , FBR,Mr. Muhammad Talha held a detailed meeting with the DOT faculty led by the Director General Mr, M. Muneer Qureshi on 17th January at the campus. In this meeting he briefed the audience on the future training expectations from DOT as envisioned by the HRM wing, FBR. He also impressed upon the need to develop a future strategy for DOT encompassing all aspects of current and future training potential of DOT. The Director General Mr. M. Muneer Qureshi made a detailed presentation on the future vision of DOT and the necessary physical and instructional infrastructure required for the ambitious but achievable targets.

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dominates his workplace is the Personal Computer, or PC for short.

The P.C. is the worlds first truly 'general purpose' machine. Given the right 'algorithm'- precisely sequenced set of (written, alpha numeric) instructions also known as 'software'- it can virtually do anything. From calculating to collating masses of raw data, to writing, to drawing to painting, to imaging, the PC 'runs' complex Application Software to achieve the desired result. It is able to do all this very well and very, very fast. How fast? Lightning fast. Literally.

While the results of an Application 'run' are electronically displayed on a specially treated surface, the PC is also able to transmit instructions simultaneously to other machines with which it may be connected. Like a printer or scanner or camera or robot welding a motor vehicle body frame on the factory assembly line.

For the taxman, the PC enables him to input and store data that he may retrieve and manipulate later- either on the same PC or from a remote location on another machine. There is really no need to maintain paper records. All information is stored in 'digital, binary' code (zero's and ones). When retrieved it is immediately 'translated' as text or numbers or images- or a combination of all three. The stored data can be encrypted and/ or hidden from view, as desired so that when confidentiality is required it can be assured. And when a printed 'hard copy' is required, any compatible printing machine will suffice.

How data is input into the machine is fundamental to its operation. This data is the raw material that the PC processes and it is usually keyed in to the machine through the attached keyboard. For the taxman, the Return of Income filed by a taxpayer- individual or corporate- and the attached documents are the basic documents from which data is picked up and fed into the PC. This Return contains all details- including Final Accounts and Balance Sheet- of the taxpayer's activities of interest to the taxman.



Of course where a Return is filed electronically by the taxpayer there is then no cause to input data again once it is received. In Pakistan only a very limited number of Returns are received in this manner. Problems with the dedicated FBR web portal are partly to blame. A reluctance to use e-filing due to taxpayer skepticism and doubts about the systems integrity are probably more important. The taxpayer feels far more comfortable with a hard copy of his Return in his hand that he can physically (not electronically) hand over and obtain a written / stamped receipt as acknowledgment.

Ideally, ALL Returns should be received electronically. That would free the tax department from making arrangements to physically key in the data on the Return. It would do away with the small army of KPO's that have to be relied on presently to key in tax relevant data.

In the environment that prevails in Pakistan, physical data entry via the keyboard by relatively low paid clerical staff carries a certain amount of risk in so far as integrity of the data entered may be compromised, more often than not. This may be prevented to a degree by putting in place a system of oversight and supervision but so long as one data input staff member's work is to be inspected for accuracy by another similar worker, the possibility of collusion cannot be ruled out in which case the inspection would serve little purpose. Also, if an elaborate system of supervision and inspection is necessary then the cost effectiveness of manual data entry- normally a strong plus point in its favor- also becomes problematic.

One alternate to manual data input is Optical Character Recognition in which dedicated OCR software is used in conjunction with an optical scanner and the Return of Income and the attached documents are "read" to extract data appended thereon which data is then 'fed' into the data base management system where it can be manipulated /

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High speed, high resolution, heavy duty, optical scanners are now commercially available at a price which though relatively high is not prohibitive along with dedicated OCR software- again somewhat pricey but not prohibitively expensive if an optimum work load is available- that will enable an optical scanner to "read" and extract all kinds of printed / typewritten data from documents at high speed and high accuracy- provided there is no serious problem with the 'font' used. Interestingly, the latest scanners and software are powerful and versatile enough to "read" even handwritten data. However the accuracy here is certainly not very high but nonetheless except in the case of very poorly written data, readability of the handwritten data is certainly now a possibility. As most of the Returns of Income- especially the non-corporate category- are presently handwritten, there would certainly be problems with using OCR software and scanners but still such use is not totally ruled out given the versatility of the technology available. And the great advantage would be that integrity of the data scanned would not be compromised in the same manner as when manually entered. But again a system of check and supervision would still be required especially when scanning handwritten returns. One solution may be to amend the statute by enacting a law requiring that all non corporate Returns filed manually in which the declared Income exceeds a certain threshold say Rs 300,000/-- would have to be type written or printed with a laser printer in an acceptable font. In the case of all corporate Returns electronically filling should be made mandatory. These are not requirements that the average taxpayer cannot meet and if adhered to would increase the efficiency of data input via optical scanner using OCR software very significantly. This would permit high speed data entry at reasonable accuracy and would avoid the pitfalls that compromise of data integrity poses.



So now we have the PC and optical scanner along with appropriate printer available in the FBR taxman's workplace. This technology along wit the attendant Application software, if mastered sufficiently, can increase the taxman's output, accuracy and overall efficiency very significantly. There is also little need now for voluminous paper files that invariably become the "property" of the Record Keeper- again relatively low paid clerical staff open to inducements of all kinds to tamper with the record, often to the great detriment of revenue. And the taxman can literally carry his entire load of taxpayer files with him by putting the data on his computers hard disk or on high density magnetic media such as a CD or better still a DVD. And he can ensure very high secrecy of the data by employing a variety of techniques including data encryption, password protection, the use of 'virtual Drives' and the like which are not at all beyond the competence of the average PC user.

The use of small footprint Laptops / Notebooks has made computing 'mobile' and again significantly increases the versatility of the taxman. Though more expensive than Desktop models they are not prohibitively priced and when purchased in bulk the unit price is bound to go down.

Automation can lead to a sea change in the concept of "Office" itself. Given the capabilities of the microprocessor powered mobile computer [laptop / notebook], it is possible for the modern taxman to literally carry his office with him at all times and with wireless connectivity he can set up office anyplace that strikes his fancy - in a car, on a plane, a train, at home, in a restaurant- wherever! And this is not really the stuff of fiction as some may believe but well within the realm of the practical. In fact today many tax administrations like the US IRS- routinely equip their field functionaries with a heavy duty laptop on which the entire workload is placed in digital format. The taxman thus carries his 'office' with him when he goes on an "audit" assignment to the taxpayers premises- home, factory, office -wherever. If for any reason there is a need to access the main office data base or consult a supervisor the LAN comes to his rescue. He can 'tap' into the LAN via terminals available at most premises if wireless connectivity is not possible or where security is a paramount concern.

Automation can be expected to yield optimum results when it is part of a fully integrated 'system.' Thus when you have integrated networking and a data base management system that is on tap for comprehensive- not partial - information storage and retrieval by all the members on the network having proper authorization, the synergy of the system will greatly enhance productivity and efficiency all round. In contra distinction, isolated use of Information and Communications Technology, not part of an integrated network, and with no proper data base, cannot be realistically expected to yield optimum results. In other words, PC Power alone is not sufficient. What you need above all else is a coherent system- fully integrated, nation wide, networking, a 'comprehensive' Data Base Management System, Servers, PC's, programmable, 'intelligent' switching sub systems, scanners/OCR., dedicated terminals- the works, all working synchronously. Partial solutions [like FBR's TMS / Mahasil] while useful in familiarizing the workforce with data base management do not provide the comprehensive solution that is a pressing need in Pakistan if real headway is to made in improving tax administration.





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Muslims and the Renaissance

By
Dr. Hafizur Rahman Siddiqui

AFTER CENTURIES of inaction in Greece and elsewhere, Muslim scholars resumed scientific activities in the eighth century CE and maintained the same, with enthusiasm, for as long as five centuries. Their inscribed works, estimated to number 1.55 million, still survive in libraries and museums in more than 104 countries. These contributions are known to us largely because of the work carried out by western writers.

In recent years a prestigious and multi-volume book has been published in the US. Called A dictionary of science biography, the book has information about some 4,200 eminent scientists, out of whom many belong to Muslim Spain. Their fields of research were astrology, physics, mathematics, chemistry, medicine and geography.

Not only in Spain, but throughout the Muslim world, scholars enthusiastically pursued scientific activities back then. Prominent among such scholars were Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Jabir Ibnal haitham, Khwarzami, Razi, Ibn Nafis and Al-Idrisi.

Their eminence is widely acknowledged in the West. That's why Jabir's and Ibnal Haitham's names are included in the list of the world's top 11 chemists and physicists which are inscribed over the main gates of the chemistry and physics departments of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

It was the general practice of Muslim scholars to open down their findings and then to distribute the same among their students without any discrimination. In an effort to take advantage of their generosity, many Europeans went to Spain and learnt sciences from them. Having thus been imbued with a desire to study science, the Europeans furthered scientific work in the countries of their origin.

First of all the monks and the church-fathers of Spain turned towards these sciences. According to a comprehensive account by Dr. T.B. Irving in How Arab learning reached Europe (Al-Momin, July 1982, Nairobi, Kenya), Rabbi bin Zayed, a bishop, learnt astrology and wrote a book in Arabic in the middle of the tenth century. Similarly, Bishop Otto of Vich acquired proficiency in mathematics with the help of Muslim scholars in the second half of the century.

Later on, a number of people from the European monastic order studied the sciences developed by Muslims. Thereafter, Christians living outside Spain were attracted towards the acquisition of knowledge developed by Muslims.

John of Lorraine was the first monk who came to Cordoba in 953 AD. He was sent by Otto the Great for the very purpose of acquiring Muslim knowledge. He stayed there for three years and returned home after having benefited from Cordoba knowledge in astrology and astrophysics.

In the same century there came another monk Jerbert of Aurillac who learnt mathematics, particularly Arabic numerology which had been introduced into Spain through the works of Al-Khwarzami. Until then, the Latin numerals (I, II, III, IV, V..., X..., C) were in vogue.

Latin numerals could be used for denoting numbers only. It was not possible to indicate addition, subtraction, multiplication and division using this system. Later, the introduction of Arabic numerals led to astounding progress in mathematics. Arabic and Latin numerals, when compared, may be likened to a comparison between hand-written numbers and those generated by computers.

After Jerbert, Pedro Alfonso went to Spain and studied medicine and astrophysics. He wrote a book on astrophysics and also prepared a map with the help of books written by Muslim geographers. Later on, he was appointed a physician to King Henry I. He also introduced Muslim medicine into England.

As interest in the work carried out by Muslim scientists grew and their importance became manifest, the people of Europe thought of translating their papers and books into their own languages. It was through the translation of those works that they could make progress in the sciences.

Since it was not possible for every Tom, dick and Harry to learn Arabic or to go to Spain to master the sciences, translation bureaus were established at several places. One translation bureau was established in Toledo and one in Seville, among other places.

According to Dr. Irving, the translation bureau in Toledo was established in 1135 AD, with the assistance of Kind Raymond I. It was a grand operation, led

Ibn Khaldun's 600th anniversary



Ibn Khaldun is probably one of the greatest sociologist, political scientist and philosopher in human history. This year is his 600th anniversary. Inb Khuldun, born in Tunisia, had Andalusian ancestors. He visited Andalusia during the Nasrid court of Mohammad V, and had served as ambassador to king Pedro I ("the Cruel") in Seville, whom he met in the Real Alcazar Palace. Ibn Khuldun was the first to systematically analyze the functioning of an economy, the importance of technology, specialization and foreign trade in economic surplus and the role of government and its stabilization policies to increase output and employment. Ibn Khuldun, moreover, dealt with the problem of optimum taxation, minimum government services, incentives, institutional framework, law and order, exceptions, production, and the theory of value. Ibn Khuldun again is te first economist with economic surplus at hand, who has given a biological interpretation of the rise and fall of nations and civilizations. His coherent general economic theory constitutes the framework for his history. His book "Al-Muqaddimah: (The Introduction) is must for any politician or people holding high office. President Ronald Reagan was a great fan of his and he proudly and frequently referred to Ibn Khaldun's ideas. To find out more about Ibn Khaldun's reflections on state economies click on the following link:
http://muslimheritage.comdefault/.cfm?articleid=600

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by a big team of linguists. In this bureau Arabic works on contemporary sciences dealing with issues in astrophysics, mathematics, physics, chemistry, astronomy and medicine were translated into Latin, Spanish, Greek and Castilian. Gerard of Cremona, Adelard of Bath, Michael Scot, Herman the German, Peter de Regio, Peter Gallego, Egidiode de Thebaldis and Judah Bin Moses are a few of the noteworthy translators who were part of this initiative.

Among these, Gerard of Cremona (died 1187 AD) excelled over others. He is stated to have to his credit 71 books, which he translated. According to another statement by Dr S.V.M. Tirmizi in University of Salerno as a link between Muslims and Western Renaissance his translated works totalled an astounding 92. Gerard translated the works of many renowned authors, not sticking to a particular field of study. He translated books on various topics, including: Zakaria Razi's Al-Mansuri, as Liber Al-Mansuri; Al-Havi, as Liber of Continents; Avicenna's Al-Qanoon, as the Canon of medicine; Al-Kindi's book as Gradibus medicinarum chirugia; Al-Wafeed's book, as Liber Abenguefiti medicinarum simplicium et ciborum; and, Ibnal Haitham's book Al-Manazir, as Opticae thesaurus. Translators Michael Scot (died 1235 AD) and Adelard of Bath (died 1150 AD) also earned great fame. Micheal Scot translated Averroe's commentary on Aristotle, whereas Adelard translated Euclid's highly reputed Greek work The element into Latin. He used the Arabic text by Al-Hajjaj, since the original work had been lost. Likewise, the text of Ptolemy's Al-Magesti which Gerard of Cremona had used was in Arabic, since its original Greek copy had been destroyed.

Celebrated writer W. Kaunzner, in his paper entitled On the Islamic influence upon occidental mathematics, says that another important translation bureau was that of a famous scholar King Alfonso the Tenth. Established in 1252 AD in Seville, Spain, this bureau proved very useful despite its smallness. There were a lot of Jews there.

They were keenly interested in translating the Muslim's discoveries and findings into Greek and Hebrew so that the same may be disseminated among their co-religionists in Europe, enlightening them. The Jews lived comfortably under various Muslim regimes and were quite influenced by the academic progress made by their Muslim compatriots.

Spain was the only peaceful abode for Jews throughout Europe. Dr Jacob Minkin, a famous Jewish writer and intellectual, writes: "Muslim Spain was the only land of peace and freedom for us (the Jews in our thousand-year period of destruction."

Christian lords brought destruction and death upon Jews wherever they went at the time of the Crusades. During this entire period, the Jews found safety only in areas held by Muslims.

Not only were their lives and property safe, but they were free to develop their culture. Consequently, the Jews developed their culture so remarkably that the period turned into a golden one. The world had not witnessed such passion for learning, among the kings and their subjects alike, since the passing away of the Greek period.

Alfonso the Tenth had employed Jewish translators, as they knew Arabic quite well. They translated Arabic books and the Christian translators translated the same into Latin or other languages. The Jewish translators could also translate into European languages directly. Abraham of Toledo, Isaac bin Sid, Samuel Levi, Abu al-Affiyah, and Judah bin Moses were some of the prominent Jews who translated books.

The third bureau of translation was established in a school in the coastal city of Salerno. The school was first established in 600 AD, but the bureau was also housed in it during the 11th and 12th century. Here, books on medicine were generally translated. Later on this school was turned into a medical school, so that the translated books could be utilised by students there.

According to Dr Tirmizi, the translated works by Muslim scholars which were prescribed for study included: Avicenna's book on the laws of medicine, Qasim Zahravi's Al-Tasrif, Zakaria Razi's Al-Havi, Averroe's Kulliyat and Ibn-i-Zohr's Toiseer (or Taiysir). Some of the distinguished translators working in this school were Constantinus Africanus, Stephen of Pisa, Pedro Alfonso, Moses Farachi and Adelard of Bath.

Translation of the works by Muslim scholars and scientists was undertaken at both the institutional and individual level. And such activities went on in Portugal and Italy as well. This grand initiative lasted for three centuries (10th to 13th century), which is indeed a historical rarty. This underlines both the bulk and importance of the work done by Muslims.

After notable books had been translated, colleges and universities started emerging in quick succession, despite a ban on dissemination of knowledge outside the pale of the church. The universities of Muslim Spain represented a strong incentive in this regard.

The first university was established in 1158 AD in Bologna under a charter from King Fredrick I. Since the kings were subservient to the church, some scholars believe that the consent from the latter had been obtained. Later on, the universities of Valencia (1212 AD), Salamanca (1230 AD) and Mersia (1254 AD) were established in Spain. Other universities which were established were: Toulouse (1234 AD) and Orleans (1306 AD) in France; and, Padua (1212 AD), Naples (1224 AD) and Rome (1244 AD) in Italy. In England, Balliol (1266 AD) and Peter House (1284 AD) also got their own universities.

University of Lisbona (1390 AD) was established in Portugal. More universities were established in Europe thereafter. In several of these universities, Arabic language was one of the mediums of instruction. According to Dr Irving, the education council in 1312 AD introduced Arabic as a subject in the universities of Oxford, Salamanca, Paris and Vienna on behalf of the pope.

With the translation of the Muslims' scientific works into European languages and the establishment of college and universities outside the four walls of the church, a beam of knowledge radiated throughout Europe. Consequently, an ignorant Europe came out of the darkness the papal system had plunged it into during the 5th century AD. This is what we know today as the European Renaissance.

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Pictorial - Visit of Member FATE Mr. Khawar Khurshid Butt



















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Address By Member FATE Mr. Khawar Khurshid Butt

In order to familiarize the probationary officers of 34th STP with the logic and background of reforms underway at FBR, the Directorate General invited Member FATE, Mr. Khawar Khurshid Butt for an extension lecture in the DOT campus. Mr. Khawar very graciously took time out of his busy schedule to address the young officers on 8th December 2007.

Member FATE first apprised the officers of the history of FBR (formally CBR) and the need for comprehensive reforms based upon deficiencies in the existing organization.

Low tax to GDP ratio, complex laws, outdated processes, high incidence of corruption etc. were some of the maladies afflicting FBR prior to reforms. He then highlighted some of the policy and administrative reforms so far implemented such as simplification of laws, universal self assessment across all taxes , tax Rates and Tariff reduction and rationalization, restructuring of the top structure of FBR, transformation of HQ and field offices on functional lines, creation of Large Taxpayer Units (LTUs), Regional Tax Offices (RTOs) ,Medium Taxpayer Units (MTUs) and Taxpayers' Facilitation Centers (TFCs) in small towns and cities.

He then explained to the audience the functions and responsibilities of Facilitation and Tax Education (FATE) wing, FBR. FATE wing is one of the major pillars of the reform process as the new tax culture envisions a conscious change of mind-set and behaviour of all the stakeholders. The main functions of the FATE wing are the development of a strong and well coordinated communication program , liaison with special taxpayers representatives Chambers etc., arranging discussion, seminars and Q&A sessions, production/publication of tax educational literature e.g. brochures, leaflets etc., designing of the improved income Tax Return forms etc.

FATE wing, FBR has recently organized a series of workshops, seminars, and conferences etc., aimed at apprising all stakeholders of the reform process. Events such as Capacity Building seminars for Media professionals (February & March 2007), First National Conference on Tax Administration Reforms Program (May 2007) etc., were extremely successful in ascertaining the direction of reforms as well as in determination of the way forward.

The presentation by Mr. Khawar Khurshid Butt was followed by a lively Q&A sessions, where he patiently responded to the questions raised by the officers.







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Training Initiatives for Support Staff at DOT



By
Amna Faiz Bhatty
Deputy Director

The HRM wing, FBR led by the Member HRM, Mr. Muhammad Talha is striving hard to improve the skills and capabilities of the entire FBR workforce. Training of support staff necessary to run the reforms units is a big challenge keeping in view the resistance to change and the prior work environment inhibiting growth and quality performance.

As part of a strategy to improve the skills of the support staff, the HRM wing, recently initiated a program to impart training to officials of RTO, Lahore not selected through IJP. This training module based upon computer training has being entrusted to DOT. A list of 280 officials in BS 5-16 was provided to DOT [DT] for a crash training program and the Directorate has organized a three weeks computer training crash program for these trainees. Keeping in view the importance of this crash program the course outline was designed in consultation with the HRM wing and approved by the Member (HRM). Following topics are included in the course:

1. Computer concepts
2. Use of Internet
3. Microsoft Word
4. Microsoft Excel
5. Microsoft PowerPoint

The 36 hour crash program has been organized into different batches. The program commenced from 31st December 2007 and will be completed by 29th March 2008.

The first batch consisting of 30 participants commenced its training on 22nd January 2008 and was successfully concluded on 31st December 2008.The second batch comprising of 93 participants (divided into 3 groups) commenced their training from 28th January 2008 and shall go uptill 16th February.

It is hoped that the trainees shall derive maximum benefit from this module developed especially for their skill and competencies development.

