FY2020 APT Workshop

— *Development of fundamental network planning skills for E-application in regional community to bridge the digital divide* —

International Cooperation Department
The ITU Association of Japan

As part of the human resource support programs operated by the Asia Pacific Telecommunity (APT), APT has been holding workshops to transfer Japanese technologies and services to business people and technologists in APT member countries, with funding from the Japanese government. The ITU Association of Japan has held workshops within these programs in an effort to reduce the digital gap for developing countries since 2017, such as introducing configuration of mobile phone base stations.

During the last fiscal year, a workshop was held on-line for the two weeks from November 30 to December 11, 2020, over nine days[*1]. The workshop was held online for the first time due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As such, classes were kept short, to two or three hours per day, to allow trainees time to concentrate efficiently on online lectures. The trainees included nine members from the six countries of Bhutan, Iran, Malaysia, Mongolia, Palau and Thailand.

The three objectives of the workshop program were as follows.

(1) To understand the issues in the participant's own country and to learn how to draft a concrete plan to overcome the digital gap in areas of the country.

(2) To understand the importance of having clear government policies regarding construction of networks.

(3) To acquire skills for proposing and evaluating solutions for the various issues in the participant's country, through presentations and discussion.

We provided support to participants in achieving these objectives.

On the first day of the workshop, each trainee gave a presentation of current conditions in pre-selected regions in each of their countries. They presented conditions resulting in the digital gap, including population and geographical conditions in each region and what sort of gap is occurring. Current conditions in Japan were presented by ITU-AJ Secretary General, Kazuhiko Tanaka. After the presentations, participants talked, asking and answering questions. This allowed them to gain a deeper understanding of conditions in each of their countries.

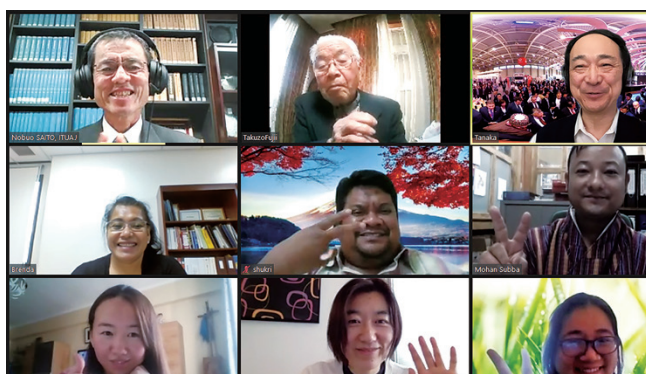On the second and following days, lectures were given by Takuzou Fujii, formerly of Hitachi Kokusai Electric Inc., on concrete network configuration methods for resolving various issues, and drills were given for participants to learn through practice. Participants analyzed geographical conditions in various regions, studied ways to design networks suited for the regions, and ways to prepare the ICT services and environment that would be needed in each region.

On the fifth day, a lecture on the current state of 5G technology in Japan was given by NTT DOCOMO, one of the top telecommunications companies in Japan and the world.

On the last day, each person proposed solutions for issues they had presented on the first day. Participants presented an action plan for how the digital gap could be filled in, applying the skills they had learned in the workshop, considering the equipment and functionality to be used, maintenance approaches and the costs involved. After the presentations, participants discussed the proposals, exchanging ideas.

A notable aspect of this year's workshop was online group discussions. Previously, participants have come to Japan

■ Figure 1: Group photo 1

■ Figure 2: Group photo 2

*1 The weekdays, with one day off.

and participated face-to-face, but this year it was done fully on-line, and designed to utilize active learning (an approach in which students learn proactively rather than passively) throughout.

■ Figure 3: NTT_DOCOMO lecture

More concretely, participants studied beforehand, reading the text and doing exercises through e-learning, and then the on-line classes focused on question-and-answer and discussion. In this way, they were able to approach issues proactively and experientially.

We also utilized the breakout-room feature of the Zoom Web-meeting tool to divide participants into small groups, giving them a lot of time to share and discuss homework practice exercises with each other. Although these group discussions were on-line[*2], there was

extremely lively exchange of ideas. Through this daily routine, although they did not meet directly, the participants seemed to form a tight-knit group, accepting each others' differences.

The post-workshop survey indicated a high level of satisfaction, with almost all participants answering that the workshop was successful. We expect to conduct more APT workshops on-line in the future, so we hope to further increase the value of the training, incorporating results from this year so that it will be even more meaningful in the years to come.
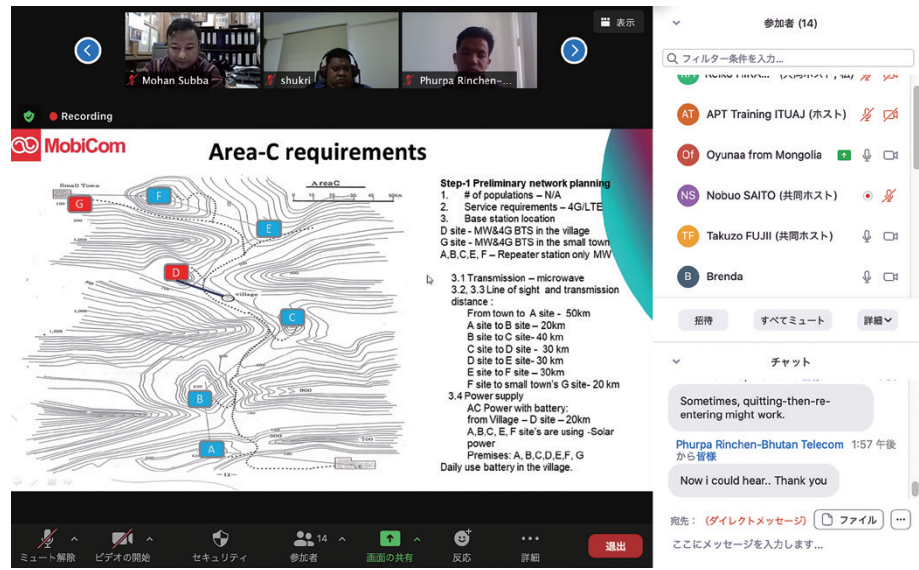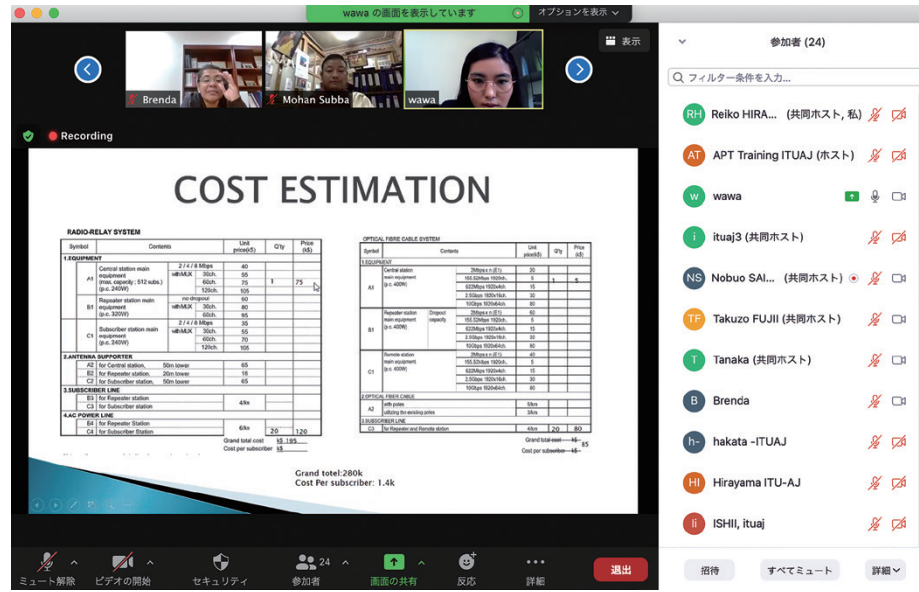
■ Figure 4: Presentation 1 after practice

■ Figure 5: Presentation 2 after practice

[*2] Or possibly *because* they were on-line. We want to explore this issue further.