



ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

United Nations Development Programme, Kazakhstan

**00116665 "Supporting the Economic Empowerment of
Afghan Women through Education and Training in
Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan"**

18.02.2025



Reporting Period	01.01.2024 – 31.12.2024	
Donor	European Union	
Country	Kazakhstan	
Project Title	Supporting Economic Empowerment of Afghan Women through Education and Training in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan	
Project ID (Quantum Award ID) Outputs (Quantum Project ID and Description) Strategic Plan and/or CPD Outcomes	00120475 00116665, Afghan Women Empowerment project (Phase 1) Outcome 2.2. By 2025, state institutions at all levels effectively design and implement gender-sensitive, human rights and evidence-based public policies and provide quality services in an inclusive, transparent, and accountable manner	
Implementing Partner(s)	UNDP Country Offices in Afghanistan and Uzbekistan, Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Ministries of Education	
Project Start Date	June 2019	
Project End Date	May 2025	
2024 Annual Work Plan Budget	100,647 USD	
Total resources required	100,647 USD	
Revenue received	Donor/EU funding	100,647 USD
	Total	100,647 USD
Unfunded budget	N/A	
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I. Executive summary

The sixth year of the project saw the achievement of key objectives and the exploration of new opportunities. During this period, Bachelor's students successfully completed their final year, while a TVET student from KBTU continued her studies. Additionally, a new student joined the TVET program at KBTU as a replacement for the student who had dropped out, ensuring that the program maintained its full capacity and continued to support the educational goals of Afghan women.

Notably, in July 2024, three women graduated from KazNARU University and two from Satbayev University, marking significant academic accomplishments. This progress reflects the strategic alignment of the project with its objectives and targets.

However, the ongoing escalation of restrictive policies in Afghanistan has had a direct impact on one of the project's core goals: securing post-educational employment for Afghan women. While many graduates opt to continue their education or pursue careers abroad, a smaller number of women returning to Afghanistan seek to enter the local labor market. Throughout this process, UNDP project team in Kazakhstan remain vigilant, continuously monitoring the career paths and future plans of graduates to provide ongoing support.

UNDP project teams in Kazakhstan and Afghanistan consistently monitor the progress of project graduates, ensuring they are informed about their current occupations and future plans.

In terms of financial expenditures over the reporting period, the 2024 target amount has been utilized. The cumulative amount spent in 2024 is \$94,973 (94.3%).

The objective of this report is to present the results achieved by implementing agency and project counterparts for the period given.

II. Background

The overall objective of the project "Supporting the Economic Empowerment of Afghan Women through Education and Training in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan" is to strengthen human capacity development in Afghanistan by increasing women's access to quality higher education through expanding cooperation with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

The Specific Objectives are:

1. Improved higher education and TVET outgoing learning mobility system for women in Afghanistan
2. Improved involvement of Afghan women in higher education and TVET outgoing learning mobility programmes
3. Enhanced employability of women participating in the higher education and TVET outgoing learning mobility programme

The initiative directly contributes to the achievement of the international development agenda, including SDG 4 on inclusive, equitable and quality vocational and higher education and SDG 5 on empowering women and girls by contributing to women's participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life. Moreover, the project contributes to the SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities, SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, and SDG 17: Partnerships.

III. Progress Review

Expected outputs	Output indicators	Data source	Baseline		Value for the previous year if different from baseline	Target for the reported year	Actual value for the reported year
			Value	Year			
Overall Objective. To enhance human capacity development of women in Afghanistan	Indicator 1. Afghan female population with tertiary education (% ages 21 and older)	UIS, national/higher education and TVET institutions statistics	0,48%	2019	0,48%	0	0
	Indicator 2. Afghan female population with TVET certificate (% ages 21 and older)	UIS, national/higher education and TVET institutions statistics	0,06%	2019	0,06%	0	0
Specific Objective 1. Improved higher education and TVET outgoing learning mobility system for women in Afghanistan.	Indicator 1.1. Status of the Selection Committee membership and regulations	Intervention progress reports	Modality under discussion	2019	Modality under discussion	Selection Committee membership and regulations fully functional	Selection Committee membership and regulations fully functional
	Indicator 1.2. Status of development of Selection Guide Note by the Selection Committee	Intervention progress reports	Selection Guide Note under discussion	2019	Selection Guide Note under discussion	Selection Guide Note by the Selection Committee approved	Selection Guide Note by the Selection Committee approved
	Indicator 1.3. Status of adoption of Standards for Gender sensitive academic environment by host universities	Intervention progress reports	Standards for Gender sensitive academic environment by host universities under discussion	2019	Standards for Gender sensitive academic environment by host universities under discussion	Standards for Gender sensitive academic environment by host universities are designed	Standards for Gender sensitive academic environment by host universities are designed
Specific Objective 2. Improved involvement of Afghan women in higher education and TVET outgoing learning mobility programmes	Indicator 2.1. Number of Afghan women enrolled in outgoing learning mobility system programmes	List of the women candidates approved	0	2019	50	0	0
	Indicator 2.2. Percentage of Afghan women who completed the language module successfully (disaggregated by language if relevant)	List of students who passed the language test	0%	2019	50	0	0

	Indicator 2.3. Graduation rate of women enrolled in higher education outgoing learning programmes (disaggregated by learning institutions and field of studies, if relevant)	Higher education institutions statistics	0%	2019	0%	0%	0%
	Indicator 2.4 Graduation rate of women enrolled in TVET outgoing learning programmes (disaggregated by learning institutions and field of studies, if relevant)	TVET institutions statistics	0%	2019	0	5%	5%
	Indicator 2.5. Drop-out rate of Afghan women enrolled in higher education outgoing learning programmes (country, higher education institutions, field of studies)	Higher education institutions statistics	0%	2019	0%	3%	3%
	Indicator 2.6. Drop-out rate of Afghan women enrolled in TVET outgoing learning programmes (country, TVET institutions, field of studies)	TVET institutions statistics	0%	2019	0%	0	0
Specific Objective 3. Enhanced employability of women participating in the higher education and TVET outgoing learning mobility programme	Indicator 3.1. Percentage of Afghan women TVET and MA graduates employed <i>one year after</i> completing the outgoing learning mobility system programme.	Beneficiary survey	0%	2019	0%	0	0
	Indicator 3.2. Percentage of Afghan women graduates in a job position relevant to their field of studies/qualifications after completing the outgoing learning mobility system programme. (disaggregated by sex)	Beneficiary survey; Qualitative /quantitative reports from Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and of the Ministry of Higher Education	0%	2019	0%	0	0
Output 1.1. Developed concept of the higher education and TVET outgoing learning mobility mechanism.	Indicator 1.1.1. Number of exchange sessions (distance or in person) between Ministries of Education of host countries organised with support of the intervention	Meeting minutes	0	2019	0	0	0

Output 1.2. Increased awareness among the Afghan women of the existence of the higher education and TVET outgoing learning mobility programme	Indicator 1.2.1. Number of potential students informed about the learning mobility programme (disaggregated by sex)	Social media analytic tools/social dashboards	0	2019	1,151,365	0	0
	Indicator 1.2.2 Number of received applications for higher education and TVET outgoing learning mobility programmes which include all required documentation (disaggregated by sex)	Outgoing learning programmes Database of applications received completed with the required documents	0	2019	775	0	0
Output 2.1. Increased access of the Afghan women to higher education and TVET outgoing learning mobility mechanism in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan	Indicator 2.1.1. Number of Afghan women, enrolled in higher education outgoing learning mobility programme	List of the women candidates awarded with a scholarship	0	2019	20 (2019-2020)	0	0
	Indicator 2.1.2. Number of Afghan women, enrolled in TVET outgoing learning mobility programme	List of the women candidates awarded with a scholarship	0	2019	31 (2019-2020)	0	3
Output 2.2. Improved knowledge of women applicants for higher education /TVET programmes on languages and cultures of the host countries	Indicator 2.2.1. Number of Afghan enrolled in the online foundation language trainings with support of the intervention	List of students enrolled per each language course	0	2019	50 (2019-2020)	0	0
Output 2.3. Strengthened awareness and capacity of women participating in the higher education and TVET outgoing learning mobility programmes on gender equality, women's empowerment, leadership, and other soft skills	Indicator 2.3.1. Number of Afghan women attending Summer School Training events with support of the intervention	List of students enrolled per each Summer School Training events	0	2019	44 (January-February 2021) 41 (June-July, 2021)	0	0
Output 3.1. Enhanced employability of women upon return	Indicator 3.1.1. Number of study visits of relevant NGOs to Kazakhstan with support of the intervention	Study visits schedule	0	2019	0	0	0

from outgoing learning mobility programmes	Indicator 3.1.2. # of NGOs staff acquainted with the best international systems of employability with support of the intervention (disaggregated by sex and type of participant)	Interviews	0	2019	0	0	0
Output 3.2. Increased availability of placement opportunities relevant to and compatible with field of studies of the Afghan women participating in outgoing learning mobility programmes	Indicator 3.2.1. Number of Afghan women participating in the outgoing learning mobility programmes benefitting from a placement in a private company during their studies. (disaggregated by sex)	Internship attendance sheet	0	2019	5	0	0

Over the reporting period, UNDP Kazakhstan maintained its commitment to supporting the educational advancement of Afghan women enrolled in tertiary institutions based in Almaty. This ongoing effort focused on ensuring that these students received the necessary resources and guidance to excel in their academic pursuits, thereby fostering their personal and professional growth in a challenging and dynamic educational environment.

In April 2024, UNDP and KBTU held a progress meeting where it was decided to replace a BA Finance student, who withdrew due to personal reasons, with a new TVET Finance student. Following this decision, in May 2024, an Afghan woman was admitted to the TVET Finance program and is expected to graduate in March 2025.

In July 2024, three project beneficiaries successfully completed their bachelor's degree programs at the Kazakh National Agrarian University, specializing in Plant Science and Technology, demonstrating exceptional commitment and academic achievement. To celebrate this milestone, UNDP organized a graduation dinner in their honor, marking their significant accomplishment and the culmination of their hard work.

Following their graduation, two students relocated abroad to join their families, with one settling in Canada and the other in Australia, marking the beginning of new chapters in their lives.

The third graduate participated in the selection process for the European Union-funded United Nations Volunteer (UNV) program in Iran managed by UNDP Kazakhstan and selected as the most suitable candidate. In December 2024, she was offered a six-month position with UNDP Iran where she will contribute to the Programme Unit. She is (as of December 2024) currently undergoing the deployment process, which includes obtaining the necessary visa for her new role. This assignment is part of UNDP Kazakhstan's initiative under the Afghan Women Empowerment Project, aimed at providing post-graduation employment opportunities for project beneficiaries.

Two students from Satbayev University formally requested permission to continue their studies online due to passport renewal and visa-related challenges. The university approved their requests, enabling them to complete their programs remotely. Both students demonstrated exemplary academic performance and successfully graduated in August 2024 online and defended their theses.

After receiving their degree certificates, one of the students participated in the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) program's competitive selection process and secured a position with UNDP Afghanistan. The other student has since relocated to Pakistan, where she is now residing.

In May and October, UNDP carried out performance monitoring visits to the host universities to assess students' academic progress. These visits generated statistical data that demonstrated the project participants were effectively meeting the required academic standards.

IV. Project Risks and Issues

The evolving geopolitical situation and the actions of de facto authorities in Afghanistan have been having a significant impact on various aspects of the project. This includes influencing the arrival of project beneficiaries to Kazakhstan and their ability to return from Afghanistan after the summer holidays.

a. Updated project risks and actions

Project Risk 1: Unwillingness of project graduates to return to Afghanistan in 2025 due to increasingly restrictive laws affecting women in the country.

Actions taken: The project team engaged in discussions with UNDP Afghanistan, which is launching a UNV program in collaboration with EU Delegation to Afghanistan. This initiative aims to provide post-graduation employment opportunities in Afghanistan and Central Asia for 30 project beneficiaries. The project team has shared a list of TVET students requiring employment support to facilitate their transition into the workforce.

Project Risk 2: Afghan students express concerns regarding their prospects following graduation, requesting continued support and additional opportunities from the EU and UNDP.

Actions taken: The project team highlighted the need for students to proactively seek opportunities beyond the program, stressing that they should not depend solely on its support. This strategy is intended to encourage independence and a proactive attitude among the graduates.

b. Updated project issues and actions

Project Issue 1: One of the Bachelor's students from KazNARU University, Beheshta Ahmad Mujadidi, traveled to Iran for medical reasons to undergo surgery and subsequently visited her family in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, she was unable to return to Kazakhstan to attend her graduation ceremony and continue her master's degree studies at the Kazakh-German University, where she had been enrolled with a scholarship. Her inability to return was due to the expiration of her Kazakh visa and the subsequent difficulty in obtaining a new one.

Actions taken:

The project team informed Beheshta about the European Union-funded United Nations Volunteer (UNV) program in Iran and encouraged her to apply. She was subsequently selected as the most suitable candidate and offered a UNV position with UNDP Iran, where she will contribute to the Programme Unit. Currently, she is in the deployment process, which involves securing the necessary visa for her new role.

V. Gender Related Activities

The primary goal of the project is to promote gender equality and empower Afghan women by offering them opportunities for education, professional growth, and self-sufficiency. Following the successful graduation of bachelor's students in 2024, the project team decided to capture the transformative journey of one of the graduates through a short documentary.

Released in December 2024, the documentary highlights the inspiring story of Mursal Malikzada, whose journey exemplifies the resilience and determination of Afghan women pursuing higher education despite significant obstacles. It sheds light on her life before joining the program, the transformative effects of the project, and her future aspirations. Mursal's story acts as a powerful demonstration of the importance of gender-focused initiatives, emphasizing the struggles faced by women in Afghanistan and the remarkable potential they can realize when given the right opportunities.

An additional highlight was a specialized training session conducted by Dr. Kamila Rollan, an Inclusive Education Lead Specialist at SDU University, in August 2024. The training focused on career development and mental health, equipping students with essential skills for future employment while addressing their mental well-being. A significant part of the session also emphasized gender inclusivity in different areas, including the workplace, providing students with tools to recognize and challenge biases, and fostering an understanding of how diversity enhances professional environments. The feedback from students was overwhelmingly positive, emphasizing the training's value in enhancing both their professional preparedness and personal resilience.

VI. Cross-Cutting Themes

UNDP offices in Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan have remained steadfast in their support for Afghan women, facilitating access to education and training at tertiary institutions in Almaty and Tashkent. However, geopolitical situation in Afghanistan have introduced significant challenges to project implementation. Movement restrictions imposed by the *de facto regime* since 15 August 2021 have particularly impacted the achievement of specific programme objectives.

Despite these challenges, collaborative efforts by the EU, UNDP country offices, and national partners have showcased an adaptive and responsive approach to the evolving crisis. As part of these efforts, UNDP Afghanistan has launched a United Nations Volunteers (UNV) program aimed at supporting Afghan women post-graduation. This initiative seeks to provide employment opportunities for 30 project graduates, enabling them to serve as volunteers with UNDP offices in Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Depending on the availability of additional funding, the number of participants in the program could be further expanded.

In conclusion, the project's adherence to a portfolio approach has been pivotal, emphasizing the importance of leveraging diverse collaboration opportunities. This approach allows for alignment with complementary initiatives, including those implemented within Afghanistan, to maximize impact and support for Afghan women.

VII. Lessons Learned

Due to the ongoing unstable geopolitical situation in Afghanistan, the potential reluctance of project graduates to return to Afghanistan in 2024 will be addressed through proactive communication.

To further support the graduates, the project will actively promote employment opportunities within the UN system in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Students will be kept informed about the launch of UNV positions, and comprehensive assistance will be provided throughout the application process. This support will ensure that graduates are well-prepared and positioned to participate successfully in these opportunities.

VIII. Conclusions and Way Forward

The experiences and lessons learned over the course of the project have highlighted the critical need for prompt mitigation strategies. As the project nears its conclusion, the bachelor's students have successfully graduated in 2024, while two TVET students are set to complete their courses in March 2025.

IX. Communication and Visibility Report

In 2024, the communication and visibility efforts under the EU-funded initiative to empower Afghan women (Phase 1) continued effectively informing the public and stakeholders about its progress. Although there were only five students left, all the noteworthy milestones were shared via the UNDP news portal and social media, including the graduation ceremony and the closing of the programme.

In 2021, Afghanistan saw a regime change that significantly impacted the communication and visibility efforts carried out under the initiative. Namely, the programme adopted a low-profile communication strategy based on UNDP communication guidelines to prioritize student safety while ensuring visibility via photo and video content, as well as promotional items.

In February, a 2024 graduate, Shahnaz, shared her story to celebrate the International Day of Women and Girls in Science. The human-interest story was disseminated via the UNDP Kazakhstan news portal and social media. Furthermore, the material was promoted by the UNDP Regional Hub in Istanbul.

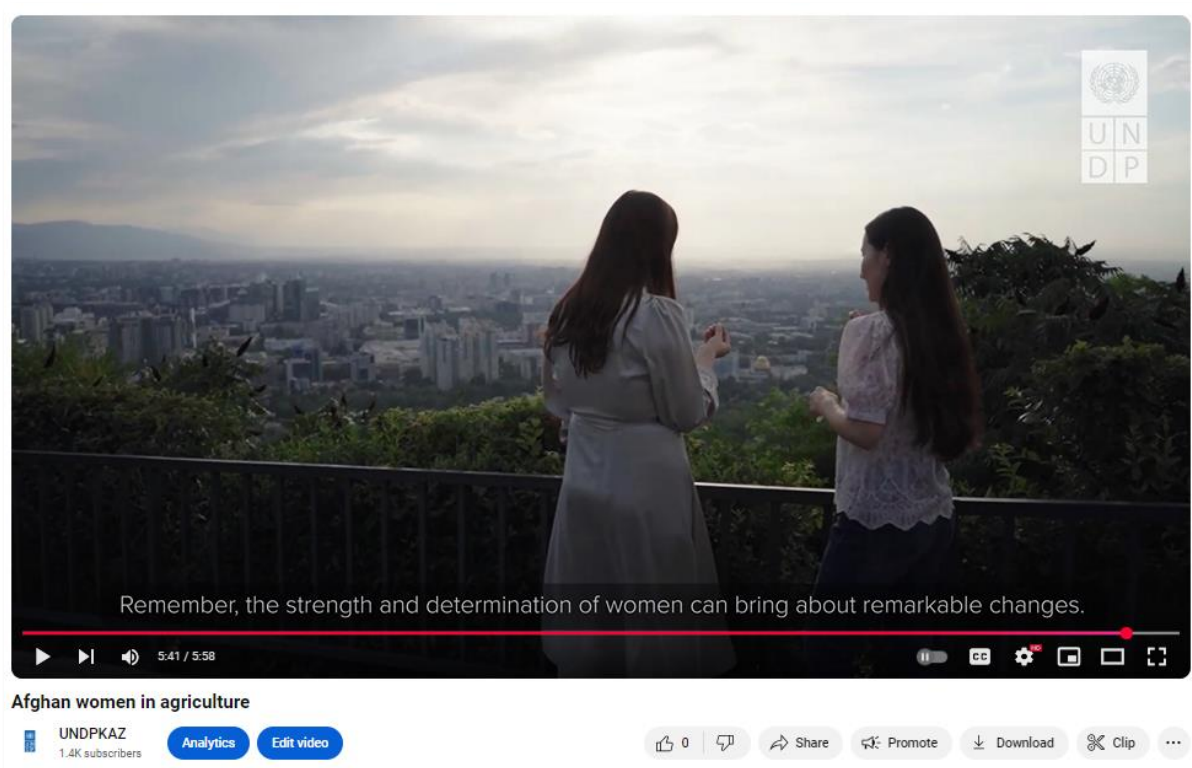
Afghan women in science: I am Shahnaz

FEBRUARY 7, 2024



Photo: UNDP Kazakhstan/Luyza Kerimbaeva

In July, a short documentary video featuring the story of another 2024 graduate, Mursal, was filmed. The video, published in December 2024, provides insights into Mursal's past, present, and future.



Also, in July and November, summer and winter-themed promotional items were produced to raise awareness about the initiative, its implementing agency, and the donor.

X. Financial Status

Activity	Approved budget, total	Expenses accrued	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total expenses (2019-2024)
Activity 1	1,016,870	72105 - Svc Co-Construction & Engineer	112,588	-	-971	8,508	-	-	120,126
		72160 - Svc Co-Education & Health Serv	161,218	349,833	192,892	74,688	38,410	18,385	835,426
		total Activity 1							955,552
Activity 2	444,576	75705 - Learning costs	1,663	356	-	102,892	-	-	104,911
		72145 - Svc Co-Training and Educ Serv	-	8 947	87,128	85,129	52,397	54,298	287,899
		total Activity 2							392,810
Activity 4	342,523	72125 - Svc Co-Studies & Research Serv	-	-	-	3,669	-	6,579	10,248
		61105 - Salaries - NP Staff	122	-	-	-	213	-	335
		61205 - Salaries - GS Staff	2,621	-	-	-	821	6,903	10,345
		62105 - Dependency Allowance-NP Staff	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
		62110 - Contrib Joint Staff Pension-NP	25	-	-	-	-	-	25
		62115 - Contrib to Med,SocIns-NP Staff	9	-	-	-	-	-	9
		62140 - Annual Leave Expense - NO	11	-	-	-	-	-	11
		62205 - Dependency Allow - GS Staff	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
		62210 - Contrib to Jt Staff Pens Fd-GS	12	-	-	-	-	-	12
		62215 - Contrib. to Medical, social In	4	-	-	-	-	-	4
		62220 - Language Allowance - GS Staff	2	-	-	-	-	-	2
		62240 - Annual Leave Expense - GS	7	-	-	-	-	-	7
		63360 - Medical Exams(incl Pre-empl)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
		63530 - Contribution to EOS Benefits	7	-	-	-	-	-	7
		63535 - Contribution to Security	8	-	-	-	-	-	8
		63540 - Contribution to Training	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
		63545 - Contribution to ICT	3	-	-	-	-	-	3
		63550 - Contributions to MAIP	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
		63555 - Contribution to UN JFA	5	-	-	-	-	-	5
		63560 - Contributions to Appendix D	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
		64110 - Separations - NP Staff	2	-	-	-	-	-	2
		64210 - Separatations - GS Staff	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
		65115 - Contributions to ASHI Reserve	18	-	-	-	-	-	18

65135 - Payroll Mgt Cost Recovery ATLA	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
66105 - Overtime & Night Differential	5	-	-	-	-	-	5
71405 - Service Contracts-Individuals	10,258	48,394	56,173	-	15,576	-	130,401
71410 - MAIP Premium SC	5	21	24	-	-	-	50
71415 - Contribution to Security SC	380	1,695	1,593	891	-	-	4,559
71605 - Travel Tickets-International	1,582	432	179	1,290	-	-	3,483
71615 - Daily Subsistence Allow-Intl	3,740	812	524	2,084	-	-	7,159
71635 - Travel - Other	6,846	1,606	104	716	-	-	9,271
72505 - Stationery & other Office Supp	39	3,893	-	4	-	-	3,935
72805 - Acquis of Computer Hardware	16	-	-	-	-	-	16
72810 - Acquis of Computer Software	171	-	-	-	-	-	171
72815 - Inform Technology Supplies	7	-	-	-	-	-	7
73125 - Common Services-Premises	2,304	3,378	4,207	782	-	-	10,671
73505 - Reimb to UNDP for Supp Srvs	69	415	-	-	-	-	484
74205 - Audio Visual Productions	3,837	1,281	2,124	-	11,297	393	18,932
74210 - Printing and Publications	328	26	487	-	852	-	1,693
74510 - Bank Charges	14	131	376	1,964	-2,154	75	405
75105 - Facilities & Admin - Implement	21,592	30,739	26,463	23,545	8,232	6,143	116,713
76120 - Unrealized Loss	9,686	21,220	6,288	37,804	180	-	75,178
76125 - Realized Loss	0	2,331	29	839	1,128	1,802	6,129
76130 - Unrealized Gain	-2,973	-24,852	-6,158	-35,341	-	-	-69,324
76135 - Realized Gain	-21	-	-945	-1,419	-537	-415	-3,337
77250 - Reimb for Med Costs (GS)-TA	100	-	-	-	-	-	100
77630 - Dep Exp Owned - ITC	63	-	-	-	-	-	63
64397 - Services to projects -CO staff	-	11,647	8,266	10,329	-	235	30,477
72135 - Svc Co-Communications Service	-	192	8,824	6,417	3,156	446	19,035
72165 - Svc Co-Social Svcs, Social Sci	-	4,275	3,250	-	-	-	7,525
72330 - Medical Products	-	695	-	-	-	-	695
72405 - Acquisition of Communic Equip	-	1,456	9,032	-	-	-	10,489
72430 - Postage and Pouch	-	7	15	26	9	-	57
72445 - Common Services-Com-s	-	677	-	-	-	-	677
74125 - Investment Management Fees	-	-4,255	-	-	-	-	-4,255
74215 - Promotional Materials and Dist	-	2,198	-	-	-	-	2,198
74325 - Contrib.To CO Common Security	-	1,012	2,793	1,933	-	-	5,738
72435 - E-mail-Subscription	-	-	994	324	560	28	1,906

		72130 - Svc Co-Transportation Services	-	-	24	-	-	-	24
		71205 - Intl Consultants-Sht Term-Tech	-	-	-	233	-	-	233
		71211 - Intl Consult Security Charge	-	-	-	7	-	-	7
		71470 - Natl Personnel Srvcs Agreement	-	-	-	34,448	-	-	34,448
		72415 - Courier Charges	-	-	-	10	-	-	10
		74596 - Services to projects -GOE	-	-	-	13	-	101	114
		total Activity 4	-	-	-	-	-	-	447,188
Grand total	1,803,969		336,379	468,561	403,715	361,782	130,140	94,973	1,795,550

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