



# AFGHANISTAN MEDIA ASSESSMENT

## OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR PEACEBUILDING

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

This report was commissioned by the United States Institute of Peace's Center of Innovation for Media, Conflict, and Peacebuilding. It assesses Afghanistan's media sector through a new tool developed by USIP, which combines elements of a traditional media assessment with conflict analysis. Following extensive field assessment in Afghanistan, the authors convened a wide array of media and Afghanistan experts in Washington, D.C., to identify key opportunities and challenges for using media more extensively and effectively for peacebuilding.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Photo credit: Emrys Schoemaker,  
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The views expressed in this report are those of the authors alone. They do not necessarily reflect views of the United States Institute of Peace.

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[ We suggest . . .  
funding media . . .  
interventions with  
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during which  
donors invest in  
the production of  
contents that support  
specific social change  
objectives defined by  
Afghans. ]

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## Summary

- The primary obstacle to state building in Afghanistan is the historical and ongoing inability of Afghans to establish a mutually acceptable balance of power between any central government and periphery communities and institutions. By serving as an interlocutor for center-periphery relations, the media could help transform state building from a zero-sum conflict to a positive-sum process in which disagreements are resolved peacefully.
- International donor support for Afghanistan's media has had two primary goals. The short-term goal has been to counteract the effects of insurgent communications in order to win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people. The long-term goal has been to create a free and independent media sector that will continue to function after donor support has ended.
- Although millions of dollars have been invested in the development of the Afghan media sector and the growth of private media since 2001 is considered one of Afghanistan's greatest success stories, neither of these donor goals is being met.
- Donor support for Afghan media has led to the growth of radio and television outlets that are almost entirely dependent on foreign funding—direct and indirect.
- Recent strategic communications policies have neither diminished nor adequately countered the presence of extremist voices in Afghanistan. Despite some examples to the contrary, Taliban communications continue to affect the lives of ordinary Afghans, whereas many communications by and from Western sources do not.
- Neither short- nor mid-term analysis of the Afghan economy—ranked the third poorest in the world by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)—foresees the growth of a market able to sustain Afghanistan's domestic media sector without foreign financing.
- The limited impact of Western communications endeavors, in conjunction with the predicted continued weakness of the Afghan economy, reveals an urgent need for a dramatic shift in the media strategies and goals pursued by the United States and its allies.
- First and foremost, donors should invest primarily in the Afghan media's production and dissemination of socially constructive contents rather than in building media institutions or infrastructure that the Afghan economy cannot support. For these contents to be received as authentic and credible, they must reflect the vulnerabilities and priorities that Afghans themselves have identified as vital.
- Donors should make a multiyear funding commitment to the media in Afghanistan. Support should be allocated to both terrestrial and wireless media through a transparent and competitive process developed jointly by donors and Afghan media experts. Aggressively supporting the dissemination of socially constructive contents through new outlets will permit access to both geographic and demographic segments of the population not adequately served by current media outlets.
- Donors should support media institutions and infrastructure when that support would facilitate the production and dissemination of socially constructive contents, and without the expectation that these institutions or structures will become self-sustaining.
- As often and as intensively as possible, media interventions should be accompanied by face-to-face community outreach activities that provide Afghans an opportunity to put into practice ideas and options that the media have brought to their attention.
- The United States and its allies should coordinate their media-support strategies and work formally with the Afghan media sector to enhance its credibility. In particular, military involvement in media production and dissemination should be wholly restructured to avoid excessive financial and editorial interference.



## Introduction

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, international development agencies have considered the media a key tool in building or rebuilding fragile societies. Accordingly, donors have invested significant resources in the media as a mechanism to prevent, resolve, or mitigate conflict; to promote a sense of shared national purpose; and to underpin an open society. During the Taliban period, the only media in Afghanistan were Radio Sharia and a few government-produced religious publications. Television was banned, and telephone service was so bad that people who could afford to make international calls would travel to Pakistan to do so. On the heels of a war that ousted the Taliban, international investment in Afghanistan's communication technologies spurred an aggressive build-out of TV, radio, print, and Internet outlets. The development approach largely entailed an open-ended investment in media infrastructure, institutions, and personnel. Hopes soared that donor investment would propagate a free and independent media sector that would support great social and political change for the benefit of Afghans.

Nine years later, these hopes have given way to disappointment. In the face of continuing violent conflict, political instability, and widespread, intractable poverty, dreams of a free and independent media sector in Afghanistan go unrealized. It is essential, therefore, to reassess the media landscape and reevaluate how the media can best be employed as a tool for peacebuilding in Afghanistan.

The findings and recommendations presented in this report are the result of a new methodology created by USIP to design media interventions in fragile environments. The Intended Outcomes Needs Assessment (IONA) is a systematic process that integrates conflict and media assessments. The IONA

- seeks to understand the media as they operate in the current social, economic, and political context;
- factors into its conclusions contextual elements that facilitate or hinder particular media interventions;
- identifies outcomes (objectives) and the means to attain them precisely. Outcomes are defined as specific changes in the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of target groups in society;
- makes explicit how outcomes are tied to specific activities; and
- enables better coordination among implementing organizations by providing a coherent, integrated approach to planning media interventions that includes a common language and common metrics.

By combining a situational assessment with a more conventional media assessment, the IONA equips development practitioners and funders with tools to design media interventions that have the greatest chances of success. (The USIP methodology will be described in a forthcoming publication.)

The IONA, as applied in Afghanistan, began with two months of desk research in 2009, which resulted in a working hypothesis. Desk research was followed by five weeks of formal interviews with more than 100 respondents in Kabul, Jalalabad, and Bamyan. Respondents included individuals from Afghan national and local government, U.S. and European diplomatic corps and development-aid staff, Afghan and international NGOs, Afghan civil society organizations, Afghan and international research and survey organizations, Afghan media professionals, international media development practitioners, formal and informal education specialists, district development council members, and local community members and leaders. Approximately 25 percent of the respondents were women, primarily from the media. In

addition, informal interviews took place with taxi drivers, shopkeepers, guesthouse workers, Afghan and foreign security personnel, and various foreign experts encountered socially, as well as the numerous foreign journalists reporting on the run-off presidential elections that were scheduled to occur while the assessment was being conducted. By the end of the fieldwork period, the assessment team had assembled a rich body of information to ground proposed media interventions in the realities of Afghan culture and conflict.

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*The media are not  
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Like many of the Afghans we met, we believe the media are not fulfilling their potential as a means to help Afghanistan transition peacefully out of conflict. To help the media function in this important role, the current development strategy must make a fundamental shift. We therefore have strongly recommended that funders replace their focus on open-ended development of the media sector with closed-ended, content-driven interventions. In other words, we suggest surrendering the strategy of funding media for an undetermined time with the hopes that they will someday, somehow become “free and independent,” and instead fund interventions with specific timeframes during which donors invest in the production of contents that support specific social change objectives defined by Afghans. Part I of this report presents a synthesis of our desk and field research using the IONA, and it forms the justification for the specific recommendations for Afghan media offered in part II.



[ MEDIA IN AFGHANISTAN ]



## Working Hypothesis

The working hypothesis posited that the conflict in Afghanistan is rooted in a historical, ongoing inability of Afghans to establish a mutually acceptable relationship between the central government and periphery communities.

Historically, the central government in Kabul has been associated with the domination of one identity group—most commonly the Pashtuns—over all others. Pashtuns perceive political power going to allies of the Western Coalition Forces, namely the Tajiks and Uzbeks of the Northern Alliance. Non-Pashtuns just as vehemently complain of the “re-Pashtunization” of the state and government, with only symbolic inclusion of non-Pashtuns. A common view is that the government in Kabul does not represent the interests of any group other than the one holding power.

In addition, the central government historically has not been able to provide sufficient security and services to the majority of people in Afghanistan. Therefore, rather than rely on the state for services, which is seen as distant from—if not hostile to—their interests, Afghans have put their trust in their local identity-based communities. The result is that identity-based loyalties on the periphery are pitted against the central government’s attempts to exercise nationwide political and military power. Since the fall of the Taliban regime, Afghans have been increasingly disenchanted with center-based politics and have lent even greater legitimacy to peripheral or nonstate actors who can meet their needs.

We further hypothesized that Afghan media could contribute to defining a viable relationship between the center and the periphery by exploring the needs of each, informing citizens about paths taken by local and central authorities in developing center-periphery relations, creating public forums in which to discuss center-periphery relations, and holding government at all levels accountable for its actions. By serving as interlocutors for center-periphery relations, the media could make a significant contribution to the peacebuilding process in Afghanistan. The media could also inform Afghan communities about one another’s needs and aspirations, if the will and the capacity to do so were present.

## Field Interviews

Fieldwork sought to confirm or refine the working hypothesis and to discover (1) what Afghans identify as their most pressing problems and needs and what they desire for the future; (2) how Afghans see change taking place over time, including obstacles to achieving the changes they desire; and (3) how media can be used to effect those changes.

Fieldwork upheld the essential accuracy of the working hypothesis. In addition, Afghan respondents indicated that the tension between the center (political interests) and the periphery (identity-based interests) results from a complex set of vulnerabilities that must be addressed in order for Afghanistan to move out of conflict.

Afghans agree that their country is in transition, although they have widely divergent views of what the country is transitioning *from*. Depending on whom one asks, Afghans say the country is transitioning from

- a distant but glorious past in which Afghanistan was home to unconquered, honorable, and religiously devout tribes and clans;
- a moderately distant past (monarchy period), neither glorious nor inglorious, that was characterized by a fair degree of stability but also by the domination of Pashtuns over other tribes and clans;

- a more recent and less glorious past (Soviet period), when Afghanistan was occupied by a foreign and godless power, but which guaranteed Afghans education, healthcare, and other basic necessities;
- a most recent, and, by most accounts, inglorious past (Taliban period), during which Islam was used to justify imposing onerous burdens on a majority of Afghans, but which eliminated corruption and nepotism, limited violent tribal rivalries, and provided predictable—albeit harsh—justice.

Despite differing views of the past, Afghans seem largely in agreement about the present: namely, that nine years after the fall of the Taliban, Afghans find themselves living in a state of persistent insecurity.

Afghans seek a future characterized by *amniyat*, a term used by both Dari and Pashto speakers to mean “holistic peace and security.” Respondents made clear that the peace and security connoted by *amniyat* is not synonymous with military or physical security to Afghans in any community, regardless of its level of violence. Rather, the security sought by Afghans requires improvements in a range of conditions that, together, will make it possible for them to live a proper or good Afghan life. The Afghan sense of *amniyat* closely resembles what the UNDP Human Development Report defines as human security: freedom from fear (of physical, sexual, or psychological abuse; violence; persecution; or death) and from want (of gainful employment, food, and health).<sup>1</sup>

Respondents most frequently identified the following eight areas of vulnerability:

1. governance and politics
2. economy
3. physical safety
4. religion
5. education
6. honor and respect
7. gender
8. information

Information insecurity is an aspect of other vulnerabilities reported by Afghans, and it suggests an important role for the media in Afghanistan’s development.

## Information Insecurity

Respondents across communities consistently expressed frustration and a sense of helplessness regarding their power to make choices that will meaningfully improve their lives. According to respondents, a major hurdle to constructive change is that Afghans must make crucial decisions about the future of their country, communities, and families based on information from sources they do not trust, or on information from trusted sources that may not be factual.

Afghans are exposed to numerous sources of information, both domestic and international, only a few of which they consider trustworthy. For Afghans, there is a clear connection between trust and security. Afghans reject certain information because they do not trust the source, and that mistrust further increases their sense of insecurity. There is a general sense that certain information and ideas are communicated deliberately to convince Afghans of things that benefit the communicator and not the public receiving the communication. Such communications can come from the Taliban, the international community, the government, nonprofit organizations, or from various members of other communities.

Respondents stressed that they place a higher premium on the source of information than on the veracity of any specific piece of information. In other words, information obtained from a member of a trusted group is inherently trustworthy by virtue of the informant's group membership. Information coming from other groups is by definition less trustworthy. This is a key reason that most domestic media operate along ethno-linguistic lines. Pashtuns, for example, consume and trust Pashtun media, whereas Hazaras consume and trust Hazara media. Pashtuns consider Hazara media untrustworthy, and vice versa; likewise for other communities. By this logic, it is difficult for a good idea to come from an untrustworthy source. Afghans turn to trusted sources for information even if those sources do not always possess empirically accurate information. At the same time, respondents regularly referred to the lack of sufficient or sufficiently accurate knowledge about the needs and interests of people outside their immediate community, and they desired this information.

Afghan perceptions of media content are based on their decades of exposure to propaganda. In the Afghan experience, most media represent vested interests conveying highly subjective content. Afghan media are highly fragmented by tribal, religious, linguistic, and political identities. Most people we spoke with believe that Afghan broadcasters have specific agendas defined by their ethnic and national affiliation. For example, the Pajhwok News Agency is regarded as being anti-Kabul government, Tolo as being influenced by foreign powers (particularly the United States), and the Afghan Voice Agency (AVA) as being supported by the Iranian government. And most people know which local radio stations are heavily influenced by the Taliban.

Programs seen as promulgating a Western political agenda are identified as propaganda, much as former Soviet or Taliban programs were. Afghans especially mistrust information from military associations. Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) strategic communications are viewed as representing Western security interests. Likewise, messages in military communications—from the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) newspaper to radio-in-a-box—are generally dismissed. It is a common joke that the ISAF newspaper is known to make excellent kebab wrapping<sup>2</sup> and that radio-in-a-box broadcasts serve only as a source of entertainment, while their messages are ignored. In short, when the origin of information coming from radio or TV is clear, Afghans will not hesitate to decide whether they are going to trust it and accept it, or mistrust and reject it. Because knowing the source of information is key to deciding whether to trust it, Afghans do not trust anonymous mass media. Hence, personalizing the media through greater local input could change audience perceptions of the trustworthiness of the media.

### **Foreign Influence**

Mistrust of media due to perceived foreign influence is a theme that came up in various contexts and forms. Media are identifiably foreign when their messages explicitly come from foreign sources or when they are carried on foreign channels. Many respondents, both in and outside the media sector, indicated their own and wider public perception of Iran's negative impact on the Afghan media landscape. Iran's influence was said to range from financially supporting sympathetic Afghan media (described as "Shi'a" media),<sup>3</sup> to opening cultural centers that distribute videos and other pro-Iranian materials, to sending Iranian broadcast and print materials to Afghans living in border zones. Likewise, Pakistani influence on Afghanistan is seen as pernicious along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, where Afghans are able to receive Pakistani broadcasts. To counter this, Killid Radio in Jalalabad, for example, takes Pakistani feeds from the Internet, but before re-broadcasting the news, revises the language to remove

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words that are seen as deliberately inflammatory of religious sentiments. For example, Pakistani sources would refer to deaths from violence as “martyrdom,” whereas Killid would refer to the same deaths as “military casualties.”<sup>4</sup>

Afghans report that many foreign entertainment programs convey ideas and behaviors that contravene Afghan norms. “Bollywood” programs fill the airwaves, as do Indian pop music videos, soap operas, and talent shows. Afghans have a love/hate relationship with these programs. High on the list of offensive media are Indian soap operas and music videos, in which women dance, flirt, and otherwise expose themselves to men in direct violation of Afghan norms concerning modesty and gender. Despite the litany of offenses recited by most Afghans regarding the ways these programs threaten Afghan culture and values, these programs—especially soap operas—have huge followings.

Many Afghans express the need to defend their threatened values. As illustrated by the unsuccessful attempt to ban the Indian soap opera *Tulsi*, there is a conflict between the principle of freedom of expression and free media, and the desire to uphold Afghan cultural and religious values. This tension remains unresolved.<sup>5</sup>

Information of Western provenance may be also problematic in Afghanistan, even when it does not concern security and politics. Much donor-sponsored information presented to the public pertains to the country’s reconstruction and development. But, as Afghan civil society members reported to the assessment team, these communications leave Afghans feeling as though they are the objects rather than the subjects of development. That is, rather than engaging Afghans in deciding which kinds of development programs should be undertaken, they feel development activities are “done to them” from the top down. Afghan respondents gave several examples of informational vulnerability in this area, such as not knowing which development plans are prioritized, where development funds are going to be spent, or how a community could qualify for development assistance. According to one respondent, media are usually poorly educated about development and inform the public about development activities based on insufficient or inaccurate information. This creates misguided, unmanageable, and ultimately frustrated public expectations because Afghans come to understand development as an outcome and not as a process. Unfulfilled expectations create mistrust between public and national and international governments. Ultimately, the media create conflict between managed expectations (development based on shared information and consultation) and unmanaged expectations (development based on inaccurate information and lack of consultation).

### *Religious Influence*

The assessment team heard repeatedly that the opinions of religious leaders (mullahs, specifically) affect the production, broadcast or publication, and attitudes of audiences toward particular media programs. Mullahs have declared certain programs (such as the Indian soap opera *Tulsi*) to be *haram* (forbidden, unclean). They have attempted to ostracize or even banish individuals who have publicly expressed opinions or written about subjects that mullahs find objectionable. Responses to mullahs’ opinions have varied considerably. In certain instances, the public has supported the mullah, and the offending journalist has had to choose between repenting or leaving his community. In other cases the public has either disregarded the mullah’s edicts or has openly declared its disagreement with the cleric’s opinion.<sup>6</sup>

Media practitioners as well as members of various civil society organizations recounted to the assessment team that the success of their efforts depends on the public’s perception that they

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adhere to popular Muslim values and norms. The extent to which media formally need to recognize Islam is still unclear. In any event, the assessment team understood that to gain the trust of the wider public, which is mostly rural and highly traditional, media producers must be sensitive to the “basket of norms” that constitute the general practice of Islam in Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup>

### *Taliban Influence*

Afghans respondents made the point repeatedly that to accept and trust the media they want “more of their own contents,” particularly on television. This means more than having an authentic Afghan face reading a script. Rather, Afghans maintain that authenticity requires a combination of emotional truth and empirical truth. Emotional truth is difficult to define exactly, and it has local variations. As stated to us, Afghans would sooner “accept something that is emotionally true and empirically false, than accept something that is empirically true but emotionally false.”<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, respondents explained that the effectiveness of Taliban communications lies in their ability to convey both empirical and emotional truth. In many areas controlled by the Taliban there is usually a local FM radio station that broadcasts predominantly religious programming, including popular call-in shows that provide answers to questions on religious tenets and conduct. These programs are popular, and they reflect Afghans’ desire to uphold religious belief and practice. Beyond faith-based contents, the Taliban spread and propagate rumors through Taliban-controlled media. A particularly effective example was the rumor spread to convince Afghans that a planned vaccination campaign was actually a Western conspiracy to sterilize Afghans.<sup>9</sup>

The ability of the Taliban to spread such rumors lies in the overall authenticity of the Taliban voice and the usual credibility of Taliban information. Authenticity comes from the fact that contents are in local languages and reflect local concerns, and because information coming from Taliban media is backed up by action. This is particularly the case regarding threats, active naming and shaming, and night letters, whose pronouncements are enforced. Respondents cite congruence between what they hear on Taliban media and what they experience in their everyday lives. Unless this congruence is disrupted, the authenticity and credibility of Taliban media will be hard to counter. Afghans are not convinced by promises of security and justice to be delivered—eventually—by the Afghan government or the international community. They are convinced, however, by the harsh but predictable justice meted out by Taliban mullahs.

Even in areas not under insurgent control, the Taliban is able to exert influence over both the mass media and telecommunications. For instance, radio stations have been threatened and even shut down for carrying programming deemed offensive to Islam. Taliban pressure also has effectively forced cell phone operators to shut down their transmission towers at night. Limiting access to information has had a visibly negative impact on Afghans’ ability to interpret different versions of events and to communicate.

The ability of the Taliban to influence Afghan behavior and attitudes is of concern to the international community. Most attempts to counter Taliban media have consisted of paying radio stations to broadcast PRT content (usually music and messages from the commander), extending existing Western-backed media efforts (for example, Internews recently launched a Pashto-language service that includes Pashto versions of its nationwide magazine show and a news service), or engaging in various kinds of strategic communications. Anecdotal evidence from Afghans and foreigners is very convincing that Western efforts have yet to win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people.

### *From Insecurity to Amniyat*

Respondents expressed a pressing need to gain or regain the ability to make sound choices in order to restore amniyat. At the same time, they consistently expressed frustration and a sense of helplessness regarding their power to make these critical choices for themselves. Interviewees expressed two conflicting opinions about whether their desired changes could be achieved. At one end of the spectrum is a prevailing sense of disempowerment that leaves Afghans without confidence that they can effect change at all. At the other end are specific opinions, which, in combination, point to the possibility of achieving desired change.

For example, Afghans attribute many of the insecurities they are experiencing to the illegitimacy of the government, which is viewed as corrupt, discriminatory, dependent on foreign support, and the like. Although respondents had ideas about how one or another source of illegitimacy could be addressed, their overall sense was that there was little chance the array of challenges could be addressed in the holistic way needed to obtain a legitimate government. The same view pertains to other kinds of change desired by interviewees, such as overcoming poverty. Respondents stressed that meaningful change can be accomplished only by looking holistically at clusters of issues and finding the right mix of solutions to address the cluster as a whole, not merely its individual components. Furthermore, before acting on any particular issue, Afghans need to define for themselves what constitutes a particular cluster and what appropriate blend of solutions can address it.

Underlying the numerous manifestations of vulnerability is a generalized sense of mistrust among the country's various communities. To paraphrase an interviewee, Afghans see life as "zero sum"; no one benefits unless someone else loses. Respondents were in basic agreement that establishing the trust necessary for Afghans to work together on meeting their shared needs depends on exchanging ideas and opinions and considering mutually acceptable options. The process begins with creating communication channels for all Afghans that are seen as unbiased and therefore worthy of their trust. Respondents said it is time to formulate a new all-Afghan identity; a sense of belonging that would be based on mutual interests and a plus-sum rather than zero-sum attitude.

The IONA works in this capacity by characterizing problems identified by Afghans as specific knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.

- **Knowledge** is what people in the target society know to be true based on cognitive rather than emotional responses.
- **Attitudes** are what a people in the target society believe. These are often the reasons why certain knowledge is deemed important or why people engage in certain behaviors.
- **Behaviors** are what people in the target society do. Behavior is knowledge and attitudes made manifest in context, though not always with deliberate intent.

The intended outcomes or goals of media interventions are similarly defined as specific knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that respondents would like to see come about. When discussing education insecurity, for example, respondents remarked that educated Afghans, particularly those returning from voluntary or involuntary time abroad, often face hostility as purveyors of foreign ideas. Rather than being welcomed back to their communities with their educational accomplishments applauded, returnees often bear the label *khariji* (foreigner). The degree of "foreignness" imputed depends partially on the country in which the returnee had spent time, the length of time spent away, and the actual period spent away (during or following the Taliban period). Respondents who had returned from Iran, Pakistan, or various Western countries had similar reports. Irrespective of the details, most



respondents who returned from abroad described some level of alienation from Afghans who had stayed in country.

For their part, many educated Afghans express a patronizing attitude toward their illiterate and mostly rural co-nationals, whom they blame for the backwardness of the country and its inability to progress. But progress is not a goal in itself for the majority of Afghans. Rather, their goal is the restoration of *amniyat*, with which secularism—promulgated by modern education—is often at odds.

Table 1 juxtaposes statements of knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that characterize educational insecurity with these same aspects transformed into conflict-ameliorating outcomes of media interventions. (A fuller discussion of this and other interventions is in part 2.)

Virtually all respondents agreed that the media could play an important role in meeting the needs they articulated. However, a look at Afghan media in its broader context shows that, despite modest improvements in the media sector since the fall of the Taliban, Afghans do not yet have access to the trustworthy information they need to help their country transition to peace and stability.

## Media Outlets

The government of Afghanistan has the only broadcast system that covers the entire country—Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA). Five multichannel media groups dominate the spectrum of private media (see table 2), and there are more than one hundred private FM stations in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, unreliable or nonexistent electricity is still a problem in large swaths of Afghanistan. Only 42 percent of Afghans have access to electricity, and it is rarely continuous, making it impossible to rely on communication technologies that require steady power.<sup>10</sup>

### Radio

Seventy-seven percent of radio audiences are rural and 23 percent are urban, paralleling the population as a whole. Approximately half (48 percent) of the population listens to the radio every day, with 18 percent listening several times a week.<sup>11</sup> (See table 3 for listening habits.)

According to BBC research, radio attracts listeners from all age and ethnic groups, and audiences consist of approximately equal numbers of men and women.<sup>12</sup> Men listen to the radio more than women do. Women tend to listen individually, whereas men often listen to radio in groups, especially to political programs which they then discuss among themselves. Men tend to listen to radio in the morning and evening, whereas women listen mostly during the day, when men are not home and they can choose what they want to hear. However, should men take the family radio with them when they leave the house, women, especially those in rural areas, may be left devoid of access to any media, becoming further isolated from information and public discussion of issues that concern them.

Although radio is the most commonly used medium, respondents stated its value and credibility as a source for local news are limited.<sup>13</sup> Its limited credibility is explained in part by the low quality of local programming. Most news bulletins are only a few minutes long, for example, and do not include field reporting or interviews with people affected by the issues.<sup>14</sup> Journalists in insecure areas may face dangers that limit their ability to conduct in-depth reporting. In addition, media resources for investigative journalism are scarce, and journalists themselves lack experience in investigative reporting. As a result, the closer to home an issue is, the more Afghans turn to trusted sources of information about it—that is, to personal

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**Table 1. Educational insecurity problems and outcomes**

	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>Knowledge</b>	Afghans who stayed may not have had exposure to many ideas that could benefit Afghanistan.	Those who stayed will learn about beneficial ideas from abroad.
	Afghans educated abroad have ideas about how to help Afghanistan progress that may not be culturally acceptable.	Returnees will learn which ideas they bring from abroad may not be immediately welcomed by those who stayed.
<b>Attitude</b>	Afghans who stayed look down on those who left, and may ostracize them with terms like <i>khariji</i> .	Individuals, families, and communities will develop an understanding of and empathy for members of other communities who have emigrated and returned.
	Afghans who left see those who stayed as holding back Afghanistan's development.	Returnees and those who stayed will begin to overcome their mutual mistrust.
<b>Behavior</b>	Afghans who stayed summarily reject ideas proposed by those who left, and vice versa.	Returnees and those who stayed will consider ideas proposed by each other on their merits, not reject the ideas outright because they distrust the source.

relationships. In one survey, only 24 percent of respondents said they turned to radio for local news; the majority obtained local news by talking with people they trust, such as family and friends (20 percent); neighbors, *shura* (community council) members, and elders (11 percent); and district officials and mullahs (10 percent).<sup>15</sup>

In contrast, Afghans consistently cite foreign radio services, the BBC and VOA in particular, as their most trustworthy sources of news.<sup>16</sup> Although Afghans mistrust foreign news sources emanating from within the country, according to both Afghans and Western experts, their trust in broadcasts by the BBC and VOA is a vestige of the Soviet and Civil War periods, when these shortwave broadcasts were the only source of information other than the Kabul government.

### Television

Although radio dominates in rural areas, television is the primary source of information for urban audiences.<sup>17</sup> Similar percentages of people in urban and rural areas report owning a radio (89 percent and 85 percent, respectively), but TV ownership is much higher in urban areas than in rural areas (89 percent and 26 percent, respectively).

Rates of daily TV viewership range from 95 percent in Mazar to 6 percent in Kunduz.<sup>18</sup> Satellite TV is increasingly popular—and increasingly affordable—in Afghanistan. In 2008, more than ten shops in Kandahar were selling satellite receivers at a cost of 5,000–6,000 Afghani (including installation), which is 5 to 6 months' salary for an average Afghan civil servant. Although satellite is available wherever a dish is mounted, cable is more popular in urban areas because it is cheap, simple to connect, and has a greater number of channels.

Although TV audiences are growing, trends in radio access have remained consistent since 2002, suggesting that TV is complementing rather than replacing radio in the media mix consumed by Afghans. Respondents in all three cities noted that, because the number of television

**Table 2. Top five private media groups in Afghanistan**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Ariana Television Network/AWCC</b>	This group operates two satellite TV channels, one of which is relayed by terrestrial transmitters in a number of cities. Ariana radio is broadcast from Kabul and relayed by local FM transmitters. Ariana is the second most popular TV channel. Most content is in Dari, but it broadcasts news in Dari, Pashto, and English. It also has a multilingual subtitle ticker tape for all programs. The network is owned by Ehsan Baya; some believe it to be influenced by Iran.
<b>Moby Group</b>	Moby Group owns Tolo TV, Lemar, and Arman FM. Arman is broadcast from Kabul and relayed by local transmitters. Tolo TV is the most popular channel in Afghanistan, with programs predominantly in Dari. Lemar broadcasts mainly in Pashto. The Moby Group is owned by the Mohseni brothers, and is perceived by some to have both Western and Iranian influences. Many Pashtuns see Tolo as having anti-Pashtun interests, which the owners deny.
<b>Saba Media Organization</b>	Saba is associated with Coordination of Humanitarian Relief (CHA), a longstanding Afghan NGO. In early 2008, Saba established a national TV station. It also operates Radio Nawa, which is broadcast from Kabul and relayed by local transmitters. Saba is perceived to be influenced by the West.
<b>Killid Group</b>	Killid is a trading arm of Development Humanitarian Services for Afghanistan (DHSA), another longstanding Afghan NGO. The group publishes <i>Killid Weekly</i> and <i>Mural</i> and owns Killid Radio, a network with studios in Kabul, Herat, and Kandahar. Radio Killid is broadcast from Kabul and relayed by local FM transmitters; however, Killid also has local studios that are capable of replacing some of the network programs with locally generated content. Killid is perceived to be influenced by the West.
<b>Noor Television Network</b>	Noor Television was set up in 2007. It broadcasts a mix of Dari, English, and Pashto. It is believed to be influenced by Iran, as well as supportive of and supported by Abdullah Abdullah.

sets is still relatively small, watching TV is a group activity, involving groups of men in certain social settings or families at home.

Although RTA has the broadest reach of any television broadcaster and in some areas is the only signal available, the vast majority of Afghans consider RTA the voice of the central government rather than the voice of the nation. RTA fails both to address intergroup suspicions and to decrease already volatile levels of mistrust. Afghan media practitioners regard RTA as a means to preemptively silence any voice that questions the religious, military, or political establishment. Given Afghan attitudes toward centralized government generally, and toward the current government specifically, it comes as no surprise that the medium with the largest footprint attracts the smallest audience.

### **Cell Phones**

The use of mobile phones has exploded in Afghanistan, and there are now five major cell phone companies. In 2008, more than 70 percent of Afghans were covered by mobile phone recep-

**Table 3. Radio listening habits in Afghanistan, 2008**

Frequency	Overall (%)	Males (%)	Females(%)
Daily	48	58	38
Never	20	13	26
Weekly	18	18	17
Monthly	5	4	7

Source: *Afghanistan Media and Information Survey, 2008*.

tion, and, according to the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, there are now nearly 3,000 communications towers across the country (a 100 percent increase since 2007).<sup>19</sup> An estimated 6 million people subscribed to cell phone service in 2008. User numbers are increasing at a rate of 300,000 per month and will continue to grow rapidly.<sup>20</sup> The ability of Afghans to use cellular technology is limited by the bandwidth available and by the sophistication of the tools that Afghans can access or afford. The vast majority of Afghans can afford only the most basic cell phone with voice and text messaging capacities.

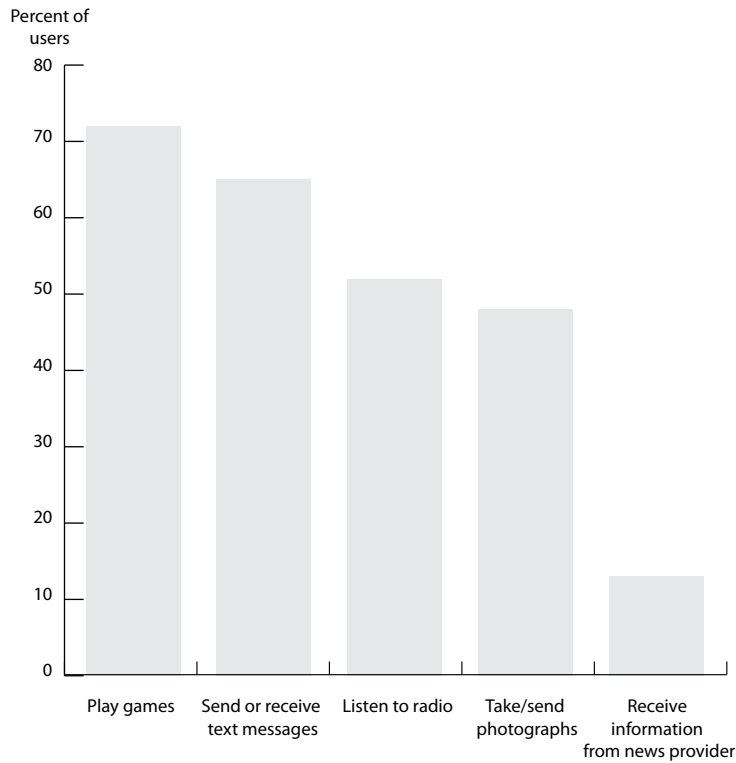
Afghans value mobile phone access highly and resent any interference in cellular network access. In March 2008, the Taliban began attacking cell phone towers, asserting that the towers were being used by international forces to track insurgent movements. After Taliban attacks on several towers caused almost \$2 million in damage, Afghanistan's four major mobile phone companies began cutting service across the south. Public anger at the reduction in service forced Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid to admit that it may have been a poor tactic.<sup>21</sup>

There is a fair balance between male and female cell phone users (38 percent and 33 percent, respectively). Forty percent of users are 15–24 years old, and most live in urban areas (85 percent in Kabul, and 72 percent across all urban areas). Only 26 percent of users live in rural areas.<sup>22</sup> The vast majority of mobile phone use is for voice calls. However, Afghans also use their phones to play games and send and receive text messages. About 50 percent of subscribers use their phones to take photos and listen to the radio (see figure 1).

### *Listening Patterns*

Media producers in Afghanistan describe two ways to listen: *shunidan* and *gush dadan*. Although both terms translate as “to listen,” they connote different kinds of attention. *Shunidan* is parsed as “unfocused listening” and is associated with radio because radio programs tend to be background for other activities. *Gush dadan*, in contrast, is parsed as “focused listening” and is associated with television viewing because of the concentrated attention TV demands of its audience. Consequently, despite its greater reach, radio has less impact than television on audiences who have access to both. Radio producers suggest that for their programs to be compelling, they need to engage their listeners in *gush dadan*.<sup>23</sup>

**Figure 1. Afghans’ mobile phone use by function**



**Internet**

Internet access in Afghanistan is estimated to be up to 2 percent, and access is almost exclusively in urban areas.<sup>24</sup> According to a Pakistani entrepreneur who was in Afghanistan to develop a new 3-G network, Kabul is the only place where network development is at all feasible. And even there, the rate of penetration will be very slow because of cost, technical limitations, low literacy rates, and the like.<sup>25</sup> However, as prices fall and mobile Internet accessibility increases (through Wi-Max and GPRS), Internet use will continue to expand.

Growing access to the Internet has led to the mushrooming of online blogging. One study reported that 20,000 bloggers writing in Dari or Pashto were active in Afghanistan in 2008. The study suggests that the majority blog in Dari partly because their blogs can be read by Iranians.<sup>26</sup>

**Print Media**

Though the Ministry of Information and Culture reports approximately 700 print publications in circulation in 2009, print media remain of limited significance, primarily because of the extremely low literacy levels among adults.<sup>27</sup> Afghan adult literacy rates are estimated to be 28 percent, with female literacy at only 29 percent of the male literacy rate.<sup>28</sup> Limited distribution channels also mean that few publications are available nationally.

**Regulatory Environment**

Afghan media regulation remains restrictive. Although most media are privately owned, there is little editorial freedom. The 2009 Mass Media Law contains eight restrictions on

content, including anything considered to be against Islamic values or damaging to national security interests, which remain undefined. The government has threatened to ban television programs for contents deemed to be contrary to Afghan religious or cultural values.<sup>29</sup> Media professionals regularly have to evaluate whether their work is sufficiently Islamic, or risk censure for being anti- or un-Muslim. For example, the staff of Nargis, the women's radio station in Jalalabad, stated that everything they do is "informed by Islam," although Nargis does not consider itself a religious station.<sup>30</sup> The staff implicitly recognize the religious vulnerability they would otherwise face in pursuing topics vital to women. Similarly, the founder of a new educational publication in Kabul explained that to avoid censure he had to provide the "Muslim" rationale for any topic he discussed before he could openly assert its general value.<sup>31</sup> Respondents frequently mentioned the need to reform the 2009 Mass Media Law, and promoting such reform has been an ongoing effort by the international community.

The safety and protection of journalists, as enshrined in Afghan law, have not been enforced by the Afghan police and judiciary. Reporters Without Borders noted that in December 2009 Noorin TV journalist Nasto Naderi was attacked and beaten by members of the National Directorate of Security (NDS). Abdul-Ahad, a correspondent for the UK *Guardian*, together with two local journalists, was abducted and held for several hours, during which they were beaten. Reporters Without Borders commented that "although a complaint was filed by the TV station and the two journalists, no measures have been taken against their assailants."<sup>32</sup> Media unions have called for greater efforts by the Afghan government to prosecute harassment, intimidation, and violence against media professionals, and for the government and NDS to stop harassing media professionals. In January 2008, Afghan journalist Sayed Parwez Kambakhsh was sentenced to death for downloading and distributing allegedly anti-Islamic materials. His reprieve in 2009 took place only after efforts from Afghan media, human rights activists, and the international community.

The 2009 Mass Media Law maintains central government control over RTA, despite provisions in the 2001 Bonn Agreement for RTA to become an independent public broadcasting network. Some officials within the Ministry of Information already favor this shift, because, realistically speaking, the media in Afghanistan are already largely out of the government's control, due to the rapid growth of private radio and TV.

## Economy

Underlying the state of Afghan media is the weakness of the Afghan economy. According to the Asian Development Bank, in 2009 Afghanistan was the poorest country not only in Central Asia, but in the entire Asia-Pacific region. In terms of human deprivation, the UNDP Human Poverty Index ranks Afghanistan last among 135 countries on the basis of short average lifespans, widespread insecurity, a weak system of governance, inadequate healthcare and education, poor public services, limited employment opportunities, and widespread poverty among a large segment of the population. Despite development gains since the fall of the Taliban regime, two-thirds of Afghans live below or just above the country's official poverty line indicator of US\$1.25 per day.<sup>33</sup>

Respondents in this assessment were quite vocal about the financial vulnerabilities of the Afghan media. The Killid Group and Moby Group, both based in Kabul, claim to be financially self-sustaining and are by all accounts the most successful commercial Afghan media. Yet both groups make money by working on foreign donor-sponsored projects and by broadcast-

ing programs produced or commissioned by Western governmental agencies.<sup>34</sup> The manager of Killid Radio in Jalalabad explained to the assessment team that his station was able to survive because of subsidies it receives from the parent Killid Group. Likewise, in Jalalabad, Shaiq TV and to some extent Nargis are both underwritten by their owners' Internet café enterprises and other sources of income unrelated to the operation of the television or radio stations.<sup>35</sup>

Given the country's endemic poverty, neither consumers nor producers will have the resources to create an advertising market that will wean the media from their reliance on foreign donors. In this environment, private ownership of media should not be confused with economic independence.

## International Support for Afghan Media

It is well documented that overall donor support for Afghanistan media has been in inverse proportion to donor involvement in Iraq since 2002. The Afghan media sector was among the casualties of the initial tectonic shift in priorities from Afghanistan to Iraq. Even at its peak, funding for Afghan media was significantly less than analogous budgets in Iraq, Kosovo, and Bosnia. When Iraq displaced Afghanistan as a priority for the United States and Europe, donor support for Afghanistan shrank exponentially, including support for the media. Radio stations, especially, that had been established with development funds and that relied on foreign support to operate were forced to downsize or to cease operating altogether. This pattern has changed somewhat under the Obama administration, which has shifted attention back to Afghanistan. Nonetheless, despite an increase in funding as of late 2009, the Afghan media sector's health remains poor. Donors tend to support only a few channels, and many of these channels have very specific audiences.

Despite the documented increase in the number of media producers and broadcasters, other indicators of the vitality and sustainability of Afghanistan's media have not kept pace. For instance, in 2009 the number of television stations skyrocketed from twelve to twenty within six months as the country was gearing up for presidential elections.<sup>36</sup> That same year, however, Afghanistan also reached its lowest level of press freedom since 2002, according to rankings from Reporters Without Borders.<sup>37</sup>

This assessment revealed that these apparently contradictory phenomena reflect unrealistic donor expectations for media still functioning amid violent conflict and guided by media development strategies in need of dramatic revision. Although there is an expansive media environment in Afghanistan, with television, radio, cell phones, and increasing Internet penetration, the market cannot support all mass media platforms. It is aspirational rather than realistic for donors to expect to produce free and independent media during this fluid and unstable transition period when (1) there is not yet an economy able to support independent or for-profit media, and (2) the regulatory environment still imposes insurmountable and arbitrary restrictions on the media's ability to function.

The IONA also highlighted an urgent need for U.S. and international government, private, and nonprofit entities to coordinate media strategies in Afghanistan. Currently, the needs and goals of various interests may work at cross-purposes. The U.S. military, for example, purchases airtime to counter extremist propaganda and disseminate information. However, military use of Afghan media contributes to the media sector's financial dependency and undermines the overall effort to develop media credibility. The most credible objections to extremist messages will come from Afghans themselves, and these will strengthen and spread as Afghanistan develops a healthy media sector that supports the free exchange of ideas. A more positive role for

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*The Afghan media sector was among the casualties of the initial tectonic shift in priorities from Afghanistan to Iraq.*

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the military is protecting communications and media assets from predation and destruction by armed spoilers until the Afghan government is able to assume this responsibility.

Despite these conditions, donor support for Afghan media remains crucial.

## Media Training

The international development community has offered the Afghan media various training on topics such as basic journalism skills, the use of editing technologies, and managing media as a commercial enterprise. These trainings are intended to ameliorate the plethora of weaknesses and obstacles the media face to becoming free and independent. Afghan media have to contend with the criteria of funders paying for the trainings, which are directly or indirectly Western governments and development agencies. This situation, combined with the tense and unstable conditions in which the Afghan media must operate, has led to mixed outcomes.

Some trainings help practitioners develop skills and also provide trainees with opportunities to use the skills. Internews has provided trainings in journalism and media management to people who then have applied their skills in the approximately forty radio stations of the Salam Watandar network that Internews established in Afghanistan. These trainings have created a cadre of media practitioners and have spun off two noteworthy media institutions: the Pajhwok News Agency and Nai, which counts itself the country's leading domestic media-training organization.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, Internews has trained an indeterminate number of individuals who are not presently working in the media or are working as freelancers, at best. Similarly, the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) provides training in specific areas of print journalism, which the trainees then are supposed to take back to their outlets. These journalists tend to be located in areas of particularly intense conflict, with a large concentration in Kandahar Province over the past three years.

This assessment found that media trainings have not addressed many needs identified by respondents. For example, respondents said that professional training provided by Western media development organizations has not strengthened the trainees' professional ethos in the face of their strong ethnic or tribal affiliations. Second, because deference to authority is a deeply rooted cultural and political habit, Afghan media practitioners still diminish their own journalistic integrity by failing to challenge official sources of information. Third, the assessment team was told repeatedly that Afghans are dissatisfied with media contents. Programming is generally described as skewed toward particular political interests; ethnic, tribal, or religious groups; or language communities. Domestic entertainment contents are often seen as uninteresting, whereas foreign programs are considered culturally or religiously inappropriate. Afghan dissatisfaction with media contents could be addressed with training that facilitated the production of local contents based on local criteria. But such training is not taking place at present.

## Media and Community Outreach

None of the current or planned media interventions encountered by the assessment team included any community outreach components. The majority of media development organizations pay little if any attention to bolstering the impact of their efforts by developing a deliberate, structural relationship between on-air components and off-air activities. In contrast, many organizations attempting to achieve behavior-change objectives—whether conserving natural resources or addressing high-risk sexual behavior—understand that the media are an essential tool for multiplying the effectiveness of their work.<sup>39</sup>



The success of media interventions for social change is often correlated directly with the extent to which a program has focused on community outreach. The series *Soul City* in South Africa offers a striking example of this. After five years, *Soul City* had achieved measurable changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding sexuality largely because it had allocated substantial resources to community outreach to amplify the authenticity of the ideas conveyed by its TV program.<sup>40</sup> Just as it is a recognized best practice among organizations such as *Soul City* or UNIFEM to reinforce on-the-ground activities with media programs, it is incumbent on Afghan mass media organizations to incorporate community-based activities to increase their programming's relevance and credibility.

## **A New Development Approach**

Virtually all respondents agreed that the media could play an important role in developing mutual respect among communities, providing trustworthy information, and helping to stabilize society and support the peacebuilding process. However, given the state of Afghan media and its larger social context, the current media development approach will not help Afghans achieve these ends.

### *Timetables for Transition*

Missing from the discourse on media in transition—and from transition discourse in general—are identifiable timeframes for specific benchmarks of change. Documents intended to guide transitional processes too often include timeframes that are either undefined or open-ended. In response to a shortfall of concrete outcomes due to ambiguous milestones, a number of thinkers and policy advisers have insisted on setting specific parameters for specific kinds of transitional aid.<sup>41</sup> Development-aid strategists—media specialists among them—can make better decisions about what to undertake when they know how much time they have been allotted to achieve their objectives.

Setting multiyear benchmarks for meeting transitional objectives is a pointless exercise without the resources required to achieve them. Since the preponderance of media support in Afghanistan comes from U.S. foreign-aid allocations, it is essentially impossible for media developers dependent on U.S. funding to plan programs extending beyond the fiscal year in which their funding began. Whereas U.S. government agencies will entertain multiyear proposals, they stress their inability to guarantee that future funding will be available even if a multiyear program has been approved. Until this changes, development-aid strategists will be constrained in making decisions about what activities to undertake because they will not know how much money actually will be allocated to achieve their objectives.

### *Realistic Goals for Foreign Support*

Given Afghanistan's social and economic realities, foreign support for the media cannot create conditions that allow for the emergence of free and independent media. There is no leverage to eliminate the various factional interests and controls over the media environment, and the current economic conditions will not allow the media to sever their dependence on foreign donors or domestic power-holders. These conclusions are borne out by the state of the media in Afghanistan over the last nine years.

Therefore, we recommend the following approach:

1. Foreign donors should define realistic objectives for support to media in Afghanistan, which have been constrained by
  - donor conventions surrounding the development of “free and independent” media,
  - the practice of short-term funding with expectations of achieving long-term outcomes.
2. As long as Afghanistan is in political and economic transition, and while most media outlets continue to depend on foreign support for their survival, donor investments in the Afghan media sector should focus on
  - changing the objective from creating free and independent media to producing contents that address a broad range of Afghan concerns;
  - reframing the time needed to achieve media objectives by making multiyear funding commitments, with an emphasis on achieving short-term interventions rather than long-term media sector development;
  - increasing access to media and information for the widest spectrum of the Afghan population;
  - improving the ability of media producers to develop specific contents;
  - reducing some systemic obstacles in the media environment that prevent media from operating freely.

We offer concrete programming and sector development suggestions in the next section.

[ **III** ]  
**RECOMMENDED MEDIA  
INTERVENTIONS**



The IONA ensures that proposed media activities are both purposeful and possible. By *purposeful*, we mean that the media interventions address specific problems, which comprise clearly defined knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that people in the target society identify as priorities and desire to change. Outcomes are also defined in terms of changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.

By *possible*, we mean that the IONA indicated that the desired societal changes expressed by respondents can indeed be achieved through media interventions, as the media currently exist, or through activities that aim to change the media sector itself. In other words, the recommendations take into account the realities of the local media sector, its limitations, and projected trends.

We divided the recommendations into two types: those in which the media are the tool of the intervention and those in which the media themselves are the target of the intervention. If an intervention can achieve its intended outcomes by using existing media capacities, the media are the tool. If achieving an objective requires transforming the media or media environment, the media are the target of the intervention. We strongly urge undertaking media-as-target interventions only when they would support specific media-as-tool interventions. The exceptions to this principle are interventions to change the regulatory and enabling environment.

The proposed programs are national in scope; however, the formats can be adapted to address local needs via local media. One of the first and most crucial elements of the process of designing a local or national program is to work closely with audiences to identify their specific needs and to involve them in the creation of contents that address those needs in authentic and credible terms.

## Media as a Tool

### 1. Serialized TV or Radio Drama: Afghan Odysseus

Respondents said that educated Afghans, particularly those returning from voluntary or involuntary time abroad, often face hostility as purveyors of foreign ideas. Rather than being welcomed back to their communities with their educational accomplishments applauded, returnees often bear the label *kbariji* (foreigner). This episodic series will be based on the experiences of Afghans who have been displaced both internally and internationally by war during the last thirty years.

<b>Target Audience</b>	General Afghan population, with a special focus on communities with high numbers of returnees
<b>Format</b>	Serialized drama on television or radio
<b>Broadcast Component</b>	Television: weekly 30-minute drama Radio: twice weekly 15-minute episodes
<b>Outreach Components</b>	Excerpts can be used to promote dialogue in community-reconciliation programs. Excerpts can be used as teaching materials in schools. Interactive radio programs can supplement the radio or TV drama to increase audience involvement and broaden the scope of discussion about issues raised in the drama. The stories can be transformed into comics or other graphic forms suitable for underliterate and younger audiences.

<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Attitudes</b>	<b>Behavior</b>
	Returnees will better understand the experiences of those who stayed.	Individuals, families, and communities will develop an understanding of and empathy with members of other communities who have migrated and returned.	Returnees and those who stayed will consider ideas proposed by the other on their merits, not reject the ideas outright because they were proposed by a mistrusted group.
	Those who stayed will better understand the experiences of returnees.	Returnees and those who stayed will develop greater empathy with and respect for each other.	Returnees and those who stayed will identify and practice old and new ways of showing respect.
	Those who stayed will learn about beneficial ideas from abroad.	Returnees and those who stayed will begin to overcome their mutual mistrust.	Returnees and those who stayed will identify and practice cooperative ways of solving issues of mutual concern.
	Returnees will learn which ideas they bring from abroad may not be immediately welcomed by those who stayed.		
	Older generations will learn about contributions young people can make to communities.		
	Youths, especially returnees, will learn about age-based respect.		

## 2. Reality TV: All-Afghan Youth Cricket Team

Afghan youths from diverse backgrounds currently lack opportunities to share positive experiences that contribute to their sense of a common good. This reality TV program uses cricket to create such a domain of shared experiences. Although cricket is not the Afghan national pastime, its popularity has risen phenomenally as the Afghan National Cricket Team has made its way up the ranks of international cricket. Team captain Raees Ahmadzai, now a publicly recognized sports figure, has capitalized on his stature to bring together girls and boys for cricket training in Kabul, with funding from the British government. He has already agreed to participate in this television program and outreach activities.

<b>Target Audience</b>	Youths (female and male), their families, and communities across Afghanistan
<b>Format</b>	Weekly 30-minute TV episodes
<b>Broadcast Component</b>	TV episodes following the selection of cricket players from all provinces of Afghanistan; selection would be made by members of the Afghan National Cricket Team, led by captain Raees Ahmadzai TV episodes showing training of selected players and formation of the All-Afghan Youth Cricket Team TV broadcasts of games between youth teams
<b>Outreach Components</b>	Players not selected for the team would be organized to help create or restore sports fields in the provinces involved in the project. Organized "peace sports activities" would be held in newly created sports fields. TV programs could document the process of people identifying a common goal and working together to achieve it (e.g., building sports fields).

Outcomes	Knowledge	Attitudes	Behavior
	Individuals, families, and communities will learn more about one another's cultural identities.	Individuals, families, and communities will develop greater trust in other communities through youths engaging in this program.	Youth participants, their families, and their communities will engage in public discussion about ways to improve trust.
	Project participants will learn skills for dealing with complex social situations, including conflict, which they can apply on and off the field.	Viewers will develop a level of pride in and identification with the all-Afghan cricket team.	Afghans will support the all-Afghan youth team because it represents various communities in the country.
		Project participants will become accepting of people from different backgrounds, both on and off the field.	Project participants will become proactive advocates of pluralism in Afghanistan and will apply their skills in addressing various contentious issues off the field.
		Young viewers will perceive project participants from communities other than their own as role models.	

### 3. Television Documentary Film Series: Role Models

Afghans say that they are open to learning from other people with whom they can identify. This series of short documentaries presents examples of how some Afghan communities have addressed particular problems and explores how these communities can serve as positive examples for others.

<b>Target Audience</b>	General Afghan population
<b>Format</b>	Short documentary films
<b>Broadcast Component</b>	Television: weekly 30-minute segments
<b>Outreach Components</b>	<p>Audience will be invited to provide feedback on each program, and on a regular basis the broadcast will focus its discussions on how successes can be replicated elsewhere in Afghanistan.</p> <p>Communities or individuals who have emulated a role model featured in a program may become the subject of a subsequent episode to illustrate to the audience how the options shown on the program can produce demonstrable benefits.</p>

<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Attitudes</b>	<b>Behavior</b>
	Communities will learn more about one another through examples of successful problem solving.	Individuals and communities will gain confidence that they have the capacity to solve problems.	Afghans will find ways to address obstacles to meeting shared needs.
	Viewers will learn specific problem-solving techniques through examples of the successful application of those techniques.	Individuals and communities will gain respect for and trust in other individuals and communities that have succeeded in solving problems.	Individuals and communities will apply lessons learned from positive role models to their own problems.
	Individuals and communities will learn that they share problems and possible problem-solving options with others from different backgrounds.		Individuals and communities will share their positive and negative problem-solving experiences with one another. Communities will take advantage of publicly supported problem-solving instruments, such as the National Solidarity Program.

#### 4. Participatory Radio Satire: “Everybody Knows That . . .”

Given the tendency of Afghans to accept information based on its source, rumor is powerful in Afghanistan. Rumor can be transmitted rapidly and widely via cell phone. This interactive radio satire examines the role of rumors and exploits the use of cell phones by the audience to engage listeners and to address issues of informational insecurity.

<b>Target Audience</b>	General Afghan population, leaders, and decision makers
<b>Format</b>	Radio drama and live call-in program
<b>Broadcast Component</b>	Twice weekly 15-minute episodes, every other episode with unresolved issue for audience to address Once monthly live call-in discussion with listeners
<b>Outreach Components</b>	The audience will help to create the narrative, along the lines of forum theater. Every other episode will end with a situation that a character must address. The audience is asked to suggest what the character ought to do by sending text messages or making a free cell phone call. Based on suggestions and the program’s curriculum, the team will produce several alternative endings to the situation. Listeners will hear these alternative endings and then vote for the ending they think is most appropriate and provide a brief explanation of their choice. Once every 4 weeks, the drama takes a break for a discussion among listeners about the suggestions that were made and how the audience has responded to them.



Outcomes	Knowledge	Attitudes	Behavior
	Afghans will understand the power of rumor and its potential for negative impact.	Individuals and communities will gain confidence that they have the capacity to solve problems.	Afghans will verify facts before responding to rumors.
	Afghans will learn to differentiate the trustworthiness of a source of information from the trustworthiness of the information itself.	Afghans will accept options for problem solving that come from sources that may have been considered untrustworthy in the past.	Afghans will look more critically at all information to assess its trustworthiness.
	Afghans will learn how to create and prioritize options for problem solving based on available information.	Individuals and communities will accept that they share both problems and possible problem-solving options with others who are from different backgrounds.	Afghans will use available technology (cell phones) to verify or counter rumors.
	Afghans will learn to seek out information they need in order to define and address a problem.		
	Afghans will learn specific ways of addressing their informational vulnerabilities.		

### 5. Investigative and Participatory Radio Talk Show: Face the Nation

Respondents conveyed a deep mistrust of authorities, particularly from the government. This program combines investigative journalism with moderated audience participation before, during, and after the broadcast. The program could be adapted for local, provincial/district, or national audiences.

<b>Target Audience</b>	General Afghan population, decision makers
<b>Format</b>	Weekly investigative report, moderated call-in, and live interview program
<b>Broadcast Component</b>	10-minute investigative report on topic of the week Presentation of listener questions and opinions by program moderator Interview of guest by program moderator Call-in questions to guest from listeners Discussion of responses received to listener comments and questions from previous program

**Outreach Components** The public will be invited to suggest a topic of the week for an investigative report and to suggest which guest should be invited to appear on air. Listeners will call in to pose questions to the guest during the broadcast. Listeners will participate in deciding how the guest will address the problem off the air and within a specific timeframe. The radio station will assign a reporter to investigate whether the guest is taking action. Anyone who wishes to may receive regular text message updates from the reporter on steps that have or have not been taken before the guest returns to face the nation a second time. Listeners again question the guest about the results that have or have not been achieved.

Outcomes	Knowledge	Attitudes	Behavior
	<p>Afghans will learn to demand information needed to define and address a problem.</p> <p>Afghans will learn to demand accountability from people in leadership positions.</p> <p>Afghans will know which of their needs are or are not being met by Afghan officials.</p> <p>Individuals will learn that they share both problems and possible problem-solving options with others who are from different backgrounds.</p> <p>Afghans will learn to use media as an effective tool for creating accountability.</p>	<p>Afghans will gain confidence in their ability to demand accountability from people in authority.</p> <p>Individuals will gain trust in other members of the public who offer viable problem-solving options.</p> <p>Afghans will become convinced of the benefits of seeking alternative approaches to solving seemingly intractable problems.</p>	<p>Afghans will increase their direct involvement in defining and using the media through greater access to and use of cell phone and other wireless technologies.</p> <p>Afghans will look more critically at information or answers to problems given by people in positions of authority.</p> <p>Afghans will cooperate to influence key leaders and opinion makers to work for a secure environment.</p>

**6. Community Problem Solving on Radio: Shura on the Air**

Shuras are considered among the most effective problem-solving mechanisms operating in Afghanistan today. Shuras have grown rapidly in kind and in number over the last few years. Because some shuras have had specialized training in resolving particular kinds of conflicts, not all community councils operate in a like manner. Through the radio, listeners can learn about the diverse ways in which shuras address a range of security vulnerabilities.

<b>Target Audience</b>	General Afghan population, community leaders, shura members
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<b>Format</b>	Irregular schedule and length, depending on the types of shuras that agree to participate		
<b>Broadcast Component</b>	Taped broadcasts of community council deliberations		
<b>Outreach Components</b>	Not applicable.		
<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Attitudes</b>	<b>Behavior</b>
	Afghans will learn how other communities use shuras to solve problems. Communities will learn new techniques that their own shuras can use to address problems.	Shuras will be accepted by communities as mechanisms for solving a range of problems. Afghans will respect and value problem-solving techniques that come from sources they may not have considered in the past.	Local shuras will practice new problem-solving techniques. Communities will use shuras to respond to a range of local problems.

## Media as a Target

### 1. Increase Pashto-Language Programming

Violence and violent conflict occur predominantly in Pashtun lands, where the Taliban have a heavy media presence. Dari-language media dominate, and there is a need for credible, authentic, intra-Pashtun discourse about the causes, drivers, and possible solutions to conflict to counterbalance the current Pashto discourse of victimization.

<b>Requirements</b>	Investing in RTA's Pashto programming to provide relevant, credible content Investing in Shamshad's Pashto programming to improve its quality Investing in Pashto-language radio broadcasting, including setting up new transmitters and ensuring their security		
<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Attitudes</b>	<b>Behavior</b>
	Pashtun audiences will know they have access to credible sources of information produced by Pashto media practitioners. Pashtun audiences will have alternatives to information produced or offered by the Taliban.	Pashtun audiences will feel Dari media bias is reduced. Trust in Taliban media will be reduced by providing credible Pashto alternatives. Sense of Pashtun victimization will be reduced.	New Pashto media will be consumed by Pashtun audiences. Pashtun will have informed conversations about community needs. Pashtun media practitioners will produce more and higher quality Pashto-language media.

## 2. Support Investigative Journalism

Journalists lack training in general reporting skills as well as in investigative reporting skills. Once trained, journalists often have no opportunity to apply their skills because of physical danger or threats, or because media organizations have limited resources for investigative reporting.

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<b>Requirements</b>	Funding training in investigative journalism techniques for media organizations and independent journalists		
	Subsidizing mid- to long-term residential international-media mentoring that will support and protect journalists		
<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Attitudes</b>	<b>Behavior</b>
	Journalists will gain investigative reporting skills.	Audiences will believe they have the right to understand issues beyond the official or superficial level that has characterized reporting to date.	Media outlets will engage in investigative reporting on a consistent basis.
	Audiences will gain in-depth knowledge about critical social and political issues.	Media outlets, including their reporters and managers, will believe it is their right and responsibility to provide in-depth reporting on issues.	Afghans will make decisions informed by investigative reports.
	Media practitioners will know they are safe from harassment.		Afghans will lend increasingly less credibility to rumors.

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## 3. Transform Afghan Radio and Television (RTA) into an Independent Public Broadcast Network

There is no independent source of information that serves all Afghans adequately and impartially, addresses Afghanistan as one nation and promotes national identity, and seeks to promote the public interest rather than private profit. Transforming RTA into an independently governed public service network would be a tangible indication of the Afghan government's commitment to informational inclusivity, transparency, and accountability. We recognize the efforts already made by the international community to achieve this transformation and make this recommendation in support of these and any future efforts to make RTA a medium that authentically meet the needs of the Afghan people.

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<b>Requirements</b>	Revising the 2009 Mass Media Law
	Establishing a viable funding mechanism for an independent public broadcasting network
	Establishing a mutually acceptable governance mechanism for an independent broadcasting network
	Instituting coordination among all international donors and governments

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Outcomes	Knowledge	Attitudes	Behavior
	Afghans will know they are represented equally and fairly in the new public broadcasting system.	Afghans will come to regard public broadcasting as credible and authentic.	Audiences will rely on the public broadcaster for information, in addition to local and foreign media.
	Afghans will know that information coming from the public broadcasting system is balanced and impartial.	Afghans will gradually develop a sense of shared national identity.	The medium will become a venue for addressing issues of common concern and for helping prevent the escalation of disputes into open conflict.  The public broadcasting system will become financially and operationally sustainable.

**4. Reform the 2009 Mass Media Law**

This law not only contains all the restrictions of its previous version, but also has introduced new stipulations that limit Afghan media from functioning as an independent voice in society. The law uses ambiguous language, is not transparent, is inconsistently applied, and it is biased toward protecting the government rather than the media.

**Requirements** Instituting coordination among all international donors and governments  
 Reviewing the relationship between religion and state  
 Reviewing the definition of "national security"

Outcomes	Knowledge	Attitudes	Behavior
	Afghan journalists, editors, and government will know what the Mass Media Law does and does not permit.	Afghan journalists will gain confidence in their freedom to report on controversial issues.	The Mass Media Law will be revised to accommodate the needs of the media and Afghan society.
	Afghan media practitioners, the public, and the government will know that the government is unable to arbitrarily censor the media.	Afghans will have greater confidence that the media constitute an independent, neutral body.  Afghans will have greater trust in the government as an institution that follows and upholds the law.	Afghan journalists and editors will not self-censor their findings.  The Afghan government will protect rather than harass media professionals.  Afghans will make decisions based on information perceived as being credible and not influenced by government.

**5. Create a Public Service Production Trust Fund**

Currently, there are insufficient resources for the production of public service messages. The suggested trust fund is a way for donors to support public service program development and production through a competitive process that would reduce duplication of effort. The trust fund would have specific goals and would define the purposes for which donor monies could be used (e.g., to increase understanding between different groups, gender, health, education, etc.). The trust fund would be administered by a professional trust fund board consisting of Afghan media experts and civil society representatives. Applications would be anonymous to prevent conflicts of interest.

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**Requirements** Instituting coordination among all international donors and governments  
 Establishing an Afghan-led administration of the trust fund with neutral oversight and transparent allocation  
 Obtaining a substantial commitment of resources over a sufficiently long period

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Outcomes	Knowledge	Attitudes	Behavior
The Afghan public will know more about issues that will benefit them (specific issues defined by trust fund goals). Afghan media will know how to obtain funding for programs that meet Afghan public service needs.		Afghans will view the trust fund as a viable mechanism to support social change. Afghan media practitioners will have greater faith in the international community's commitment to independent media. Afghan media companies will have a greater incentive to consider and produce public interest content. Afghan media organizations will feel less beholden to specific interest groups. Afghan audiences will perceive media contents as credible and authentic.	Afghan media will compete to receive support for public service programming. Radio stations and television channels will use more airtime to broadcast public interest content. Afghan media organizations will produce and disseminate credible and authentic programming.

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**6. Expand the Use of Wireless Technologies**

**A. Cell Phone Microenterprise: "Mobile Men"**

This initiative will expand access to mobile communications by providing micro grants to men (and, where possible, to women) to buy cell phones to use in microenterprises. The grantees would then rent airtime and Internet access to customers in their communities. Following the successful example of the Grameen Foundation's "Mobile Ladies" (Bangladesh), this proposed intervention aims to extend access to communication technologies into rural areas (especially

southern Afghanistan) by taking advantage of the commission-based airtime rental service offered by Roshan, Afghanistan’s leading cellular services provider.

<b>Requirements</b>	Providing micro grant funds for phones Providing technical training for grant recipients		
<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Attitudes</b>	<b>Behavior</b>
	Afghans will know they can access information that was previously unavailable. Afghans will have a greater range of information sources to guide judgments and choices. Elites will know they cannot dominate communications and messages in their communities. Participants will be trained to use Internet-enabled cell phones to operate a small business.	Afghans will feel they have access to information needed to make sound choices. Marginalized communities will feel less isolated.	Marginalized communities will expand their sphere of contacts and knowledge. Microenterprise participants will actively promote the use of their communications skills and technology in their communities. A wider range of people within marginalized communities will use new communications technologies to address their needs.

**B. Cell Phone Journalism: *Mobile News***

This intervention will allow cell phone users to receive news updates in the form of text messages and recorded voice messages. Users will call a toll-free number or answer an automatically dialed call to hear a specially produced news package. A key part of the news package will be the inclusion of (moderated) citizen journalism content, giving ordinary Afghans the chance to hear fellow Afghans’ voices. The program is modeled on the successes of the Jasmine News Wire (JNW) in Sri Lanka, which uses conflict resolution principles to shape the headlines, and on Telenor Pakistan, which provides BBC news bulletins as a call-in cell phone service. *Mobile News* intends to dispel the reliance on rumors and gossip and to mitigate the attitudes and behaviors that rumors tend to produce.

<b>Requirements</b>	Providing opportunities for Afghans to serve as citizen journalists Training in conflict-sensitive reporting (including advice from JNW and Telenor Pakistan) for participating media and citizen journalists Forming an editorial and management committee consisting of credible professionals from across the Afghan spectrum to maintain the standards of the contents provided, to prevent abuse by ideologues and propagandists of any sort, and to oversee the operation Distributing cell phones with video and photographic capacity via various mechanisms such as prize-based competitions, etc. Entering agreements with TV broadcasters to carry citizen reports, much like CNN’s iReport Establishing partnerships with cell phone providers to design incentive mechanisms (such as airtime credit), free numbers for text messages and calls, and distribution of multimedia-capable phones
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Outcomes	Knowledge	Attitudes	Behavior
	Afghans will learn citizen journalist skills.	Afghans will be less susceptible to the influence of rumor.	Mainstream media will use stories coming from citizen journalists.
	Afghans will develop skills in conflict-sensitive reporting.	Afghans will feel more confident about making informed decisions.	Afghans will engage in citizen-journalism programs established by mainstream media.
	Media practitioners will develop skills as editors and managers of citizen-journalism programs.	Afghans will gain trust in information coming from sources that were previously not considered trustworthy.	Afghans will make decisions based on information from a range of sources.
	Afghans will know they have a range of information sources to guide judgments and choices.		

## Conclusion

Nine years after the fall of the Taliban regime, Afghan society is still in the throes of a transition from a theocratic system to a new form of social and political organization. A major engine of this transition has been the involvement of the international community, whose primary tool for driving the process has been military. Although Afghans initially accepted the use of force to make certain aspects of the transition possible, the dominant sentiment in the country now is that insecurity is as high as it has ever been. Afghans do not have enough trust in either the Kabul government or the intentions of foreigners to rely on either for meeting their needs. This assessment has explored the Afghanistan media landscape and has suggested ways in which the media may play a more significant and effective role in this transition.

Afghan media are themselves in transition from decades of suppression to operating with various degrees of freedom. Most media remain in the hands of political or ethno-tribal factions who use the media to advance their narrow interests. This includes RTA, which is controlled by the executive branch of the central government. Furthermore, although there have been some improvements in the Afghan economy since 2001, the country remains at the bottom of UNDP's Human Development Index.

Nevertheless, the international community has been attempting to support the development of "free and independent media" in Afghanistan. We have argued that, given Afghanistan's current social, political, and economic conditions, the media cannot be expected to develop into free and independent entities, regardless of the kinds or level of foreign support. We therefore strongly recommended that donors consider a major shift in their media support strategy: replacing their focus on open-ended development with a focus on closed-ended interventions. Open-ended development has been defined as investment in media institutions and structures with an undetermined timeframe to become free and independent. Closed-ended intervention has been defined as a specified timeframe during which donors invest in the media's production of contents that support specific social change objectives determined by Afghans.

We share the opinion held by many of the respondents in this assessment that the media could play a significantly more powerful role in Afghanistan's peaceful transition to a future that Afghans envision for themselves. To support this transition, media activities must be based



on a sound assessment that considers both the purpose of and the possibility of implementing specific initiatives amid ongoing conflict.

A media strategy for Afghanistan cannot be encumbered with the expectation that, in one of the world's poorest nations, TV and radio will successfully emulate foreign models of profit-driven media. Rather, support for the media should be driven by a vision of helping Afghans get the information they need to stabilize their fragile society and go about their daily lives with a sense of well-being.

## Notes

1. Daud S. Saba and Omar Zakhilwal, *Security with a Human Face: Challenges and Responsibilities*, Afghanistan National Human Development Report (Islamabad: UNDP, 2004).
2. We had kebab served to us several times wrapped in the ISAF newspaper, whose better paper quality makes it more resistant to absorbing grease.
3. Objections to Iran's impact on Afghan media came from Hazaras, who are Shi'a, as well as from Sunnis, indicating that this position was not based exclusively on the respondent's religious identity.
4. Interview, Mohammad Shafeiq Hamdard, manager, RKG Nangahar (Radio Killid Group), October 2009.
5. Despite being criticized for its offensive contents, *Tulsi* was cited by the majority of respondents as the most widely watched program on television in Afghanistan. This paradox brings up two issues confronting social science research, including media assessments. First is the need to compare what respondents say against what they do. In the case of *Tulsi*, respondents' attitudes and behaviors regarding the program are contradictory. Accordingly, it is necessary to explore the reasons for respondents' declarations and behaviors. Producers of media for social change too often are quick to declare their programs a success because they are widely watched. Audience share is clearly important, but it is more critical to discover whether the audience is watching because of a lack of choice or for reasons having to do with the objectives that program is trying to achieve.
6. These represent only a few of respondents' examples of mullahs attempting to influence the way media operate in Afghanistan.
7. This phrase is from Muhammad Naim, a community leader interviewed in Bamyan, October 2009.
8. This juxtaposition was articulated by Dr. Muhammad Akbar during a conversation in Kabul in October 2009.
9. The same rumor, also spread via cell phones, took hold in Kosovo in 2000–2001.
10. Kabul acquired full electrical service only in late 2008 and even now does not have reliable power. Outside the cities, electricity is very sketchy or nonexistent. In Kabul, despite the improvement in the electricity supply, the team experienced sporadic power shortages and saw that many people still keep gas-powered generators in case of longer blackouts.
11. *Afghanistan Media and Information Survey*, undated copy of presentation to Commander of International Security Assistance Force, Kabul, Afghanistan, August 2008.
12. BBC Trust, *Afghanistan Media Survey*, prepared by D3 Systems, Inc., and ACSOR-Surveys 2007–08. Available at [http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/review\\_report\\_research/ar2007\\_08/afghanistan\\_research.pdf](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/review_report_research/ar2007_08/afghanistan_research.pdf).
13. Asia Foundation, *Afghanistan in 2009: A Survey of the Afghan People* (Kabul: Asia Foundation, 2009). The Asia Foundation's measurements of media use found that radio and television are both used for national and international news. However, for local news, or to validate information from the mass media, 20 percent of people in rural areas and 9 percent of urban dwellers turn to friends, family, and neighbors.
14. *Communication for Stabilisation*, feasibility study for the UK Department for International Development by Media Support Solutions, Annex 1: Media Mapping in Helmand and Kandahar, February 2008.
15. *Afghanistan Media and Information Survey, 2008*.
16. *Afghanistan DeepDive: A Strategic Communications Seminar*, presented by Broadcasting Board of Governors and U.S. Department of State Bureau of Intelligence and Research. Research conducted by D3 Systems and ACSOR Survey, with information from the August 2008 BBG-State/INR national survey. SLIDE 28. Afghans rate the trustworthiness of foreign news broadcasters as follows: BBC: 64 percent, VOA Radio Ashna: 54 percent, REFERL Radio Azadi: 51 percent.
17. BBC Trust, *Afghanistan Media Survey*.
18. *Afghanistan Media and Information Survey, 2008*. The higher rates found in Mazar were likely due to the availability of reliable electricity at the time the survey was conducted.
19. Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, *A Summary of Achievements in 1386* (March 21, 2007–March 20, 2008) (Kabul: Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2008).

20. Nick Fielding, *Internet Media Strategy in Afghanistan* (London: UK Department for International Development, July 2008).
21. Associated Press, "Taliban May Regret Strikes on Cell Phone Towers," MNBC, March 26, 2008.
22. *Afghanistan DeepDive: A Strategic Communications Seminar*, 2008.
23. Interview, Najiba Ayubi, general director, Killid Radio, Kabul, October 2009.
24. Fielding, *Internet Media Strategy in Afghanistan*.
25. Interview with Ayaz Khan, independent wireless telecommunications entrepreneur, Kabul, October 2009.
26. Fielding, *Internet Media Strategy in Afghanistan*.
27. Interview with Deputy Minister Rashidi Mobarez, Kabul, October 2009.
28. 2009 UNDP Human Development Report, [http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/country\\_fact\\_sheets/cty\\_fs\\_AFG.html](http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_AFG.html) (accessed August 25, 2010).
29. Tolo TV broadcasts the Indian soap opera *Tulsi*, which, like much other media programming from India, is frequently cited as violating Afghan religious and cultural norms. Nonetheless, *Tulsi* is one of the most widely watched programs in the country. At one point, the Afghan Government tried to have *Tulsi* taken off the air, but Tolo resisted, citing freedom of expression. Afghans interviewed for the assessment, however, are convinced that *Tulsi* has remained on air because of Western threats to withhold aid to Kabul if the ban were upheld.
30. Interview, Nargis senior reporter, Jalalabad, October 2009.
31. Interview, Shahabuddin Terakhil, independent educational journalist and former news director of Noor TV in Kabul, Kabul, October 2009.
32. Reporters Without Borders, "Three Reporters Freed But Physical Attacks on Journalists Continue," December 17, 2009, <http://en.rsf.org/afghanistan-three-reporters-freed-but-physical-17-12-2009,35370> (accessed July 15, 2010).
33. Asian Development Bank, Afghanistan: Fact Sheet (April 2009), <http://www.adb.org/Documents/Fact-Sheets/AFG.pdf>.
34. Stations belonging to the Salam Watandar network generate income by pooling the revenues brought in through the Salam Watandar program they are all required to air for three hours per day. Both Internews and radio station personnel concede, however, that this income is insufficient to maintain these stations financially and that their main sources of revenue are broadcasting programs commissioned by Western agencies or selling airtime to Western agencies.
35. Interviews with Mohammad Shafeiq Hamdard, manager of RKG Nangahar, and Shafiquallah Shaiq, president of the Shaiq Network, Jalalabad, October 2009.
36. Some of these new TV stations were created opportunistically by political actors wanting to support their own election agendas and ambitions. See Rahilla Zafar, "Afghanistan's Media Battleground," (n.d), <http://knowledge.insead.edu/Afghanmediabattleground081226.cfm> (accessed September 26, 2010).
37. According to Reporters Without Borders, in 2002, Afghanistan ranked 104 among 139 countries surveyed, with a total "press freedom" score of 35.5. In 2009 the country ranked 149 of 175 countries, with a score of 54.25. The higher the score, the lower the level of press freedom. The Press Freedom Index is accessible at <http://en.rsf.org/>.
38. Internews, "Diversifying Newsrooms, Expanding Coverage," June 2009, [http://www.internews.org/bulletin/afghanistan/Afghan\\_200906.html](http://www.internews.org/bulletin/afghanistan/Afghan_200906.html) (accessed July 15, 2010).
39. For example, in Laos the Wildlife Conservation Society collaborates with the outreach team of Lao National Radio to educate and entertain rural and urban people about threats facing the country's internationally significant biodiversity. See Santi Saypanya and Renae Stenhouse, "Mass Media Community Outreach: Using the National Radio for Biodiversity Conservation in Lao PDR" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the North American Association for Environmental Education, October 8, 2006) [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p124620\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p124620_index.html) (accessed July 15, 2010). Also see Boima Kpuagor, Josephine Jamiru, Abdulqadir Omar, and Sara Casey, "HIV/AIDS KAP and Community Outreach in a Post-Conflict Setting in Kenema District, Sierra Leone," [http://www.rhrc.org/resources/general\\_reports/con03/pdf/sonianavani.pdf](http://www.rhrc.org/resources/general_reports/con03/pdf/sonianavani.pdf).
40. For a fuller exploration of how *Soul City* exemplifies an integrated approach to changing social norms, see UNIFEM, "Community Mobilization, Outreach and Mass Media," <http://www.endvawnow.org/?men-boys&menub=59&id=29> (accessed July 15, 2010).
41. For instance, in *Sustainable Security in Afghanistan: Crafting an Effective and Responsible Strategy for the Forgotten Front*, the authors offer short-term (18 months), mid-term (3–5 years), and long-term (5–10 years) parameters for different kinds of results. [http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/03/pdf/sustainable\\_afghanistan.pdf](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/03/pdf/sustainable_afghanistan.pdf).



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The media sector can play a key role in helping fragile nations transition out of conflict. International agencies acknowledge this potential and invest considerable resources in trying to establish media outlets that are editorially free and financially independent. Typically, donors do not establish a timeframe in which to achieve a free and independent media sector in any fragile nation. This open-ended approach to media development has been tried in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban, and, after nearly a decade, it has failed to yield anticipated results. A new media assessment tool developed by USIP combines elements of a traditional media assessment with a conflict analysis to provide a concrete and realistic understanding of how media can advance social stability and peace in any nation in conflict. The authors assessed the Afghanistan media sector using this tool, and they present their key findings and recommendations in this report. Based on their holistic assessment, the authors recommend a fundamental shift in the approach to media development in Afghanistan. They urge funders to move away from an open-ended strategy of creating a free and independent media sector. In its place, the authors recommend that funders support specific content-driven interventions that promote social stability objectives as defined by Afghans themselves.

## Related Links

- *Crowdsourcing Crisis Information in Disaster-Affected Haiti* by Jessica Heinzelman and Carol Waters (Special Report, October 2010)
- *Blogs and Bullets: New Media in Contentious Politics* by Sean Aday, Henry Farrell, Marc Lynch, John Sides, John Kelly, and Ethan Zuckerman (Peaceworks, September 2010)
- *Advancing New Media Research* by Sean Aday, Henry Farrell, Marc Lynch, and John Sides (Special Report, September 2010)
- *Preventing Media Incitement to Violence in Iraq* by Theo Dolan (Peace Brief, April 2010)
- *Media and Peacebuilding in Afghanistan* by Sheldon Himelfarb (Peace Brief, March 2010)

