

The Potential for Community Radio in Afghanistan

Report of a fact-finding mission to Afghanistan
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Executive Summary

Is community radio a viable option for Afghanistan? What would it sound like? How would it fit into a national public-service radio system? What type of governance structures will ensure stations are both responsive to their communities and independent? Is it necessary to wait until the legal and regulatory framework is in place?

This study, sponsored by the Communication Assistance Foundation,^{*} examines the potential for community-based radio in Afghanistan and identifies examples of how community radio can support initiatives for community development. The report and its recommendations are primarily intended as a resource for agencies and organizations considering supporting radio, media or communication activities in the country, whether with funds or expertise.

Afghanistan has a 70 per cent illiteracy rate (85 percent among women), devastated infrastructures and a largely rural population – according to some estimates, 85 percent of the population lives in 37,000 villages. Barely four percent of households have electricity and even in major cities the telecommunications infrastructure is virtually non-existent. Only Herat has a modern functioning landline telephone network, complete with public call booths. Kabul's GSM network offers irregular service and its capacity is insufficient for its 12,000 customers. The Internet, banned by the Taliban, is still unavailable, except to UN agencies, NGOs and a few ministries. The demand for education far exceeds the capacity to supply it.

However, most Afghans do have access to radio receivers and are accustomed to using radio as a source of news, information, education and entertainment. Community radio, understood as radio which is community-based, independent and participatory, offers a low-cost and effective way of contributing to medium and long-term efforts for reconstruction, development, democracy and nation-building.

The present media landscape is diverse, unregulated and rapidly changing, with a recent boom of media activity. More than one hundred periodicals have been registered, many with international funding. Radio Afghanistan's network is being rebuilt. Television is back in Kabul and in some other towns, although without satisfying a widespread demand for entertainment. There is no complete and accurate inventory of Afghan media (this report provides a partial one). According to Radio Afghanistan, seventeen provincial stations are active, but there is a less clear picture of what is being broadcast on them. Conventional means of network programme distribution are unavailable and programming is primarily local.

The politics of media support and development in Afghanistan are a microcosm of the larger politics of reconstruction and development in the country. The developing media landscape, including the legislative and regulatory context, is critical to the development of community broadcasting and has been marked by both positive developments and setbacks over the past year. There are a variety of centres of influence in the current reconstruction and development context, including: the Afghan government, UN agencies and development organisations, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), regional political-military powers (often referred to as "warlords"), the US-led Coalition Forces, and emerging Afghan civil society organizations, including independent media. The picture that emerges illustrates the sensitive nature of media in Afghanistan and hints at the complexities of the policy-

^{*} (CAF/SCO), a Dutch NGO <http://www.cafSCO.nl>

making process in the current environment. There are many positive initiatives at the national level and in major cities, but little is attention paid to community-based media and rural areas.

Afghanistan's new press law, while not without its critics, is generally seen as a positive step, paving the way for private and community broadcasting and an independent press. A subsequent policy statement, proposed, among other things, an Independent Broadcasting Authority to be responsible for granting broadcast licences and the transformation of Radio-Television Afghanistan into an independent public service broadcaster. In September 2002 an *International Seminar on Promoting Independent and Pluralistic Media in Afghanistan* confirmed and refined the policy statement and established schedules for completion of some of the activities. Full implementation of the policy proposals could take as long as two years, with the interim period marked by an *ad hoc* phase during which actors with strong military, political or financial backing can have an inordinate amount of influence. The importance of developing and implementing a new policy framework for the central government, including transparent policies for licensing and regulation of broadcasting that specifically recognize and stimulate community-based broadcasting, cannot be understated.

Many Afghan and international NGOs and development agencies have expressed interest in supporting radio initiatives in Afghanistan. To date most efforts have been directed toward supporting the *professionalization* of the medium, with activities such as training journalists, producing quality independent current affairs programmes for broadcast on existing stations, and supporting efforts to transform Radio-Television Afghanistan into a national public service broadcaster.

A second *grassroots* approach focuses on stations based in grassroots civil society formations in smaller communities. In this approach stations would not be staffed with professional journalists or presenters, but with "communicators" from the community. They would adopt programming formats and contents that respond to development objectives and *community service* requirements as established by community members themselves. The emphasis is on communication as a two-way social process, on democratic ownership and control of local development efforts, and on enabling people to debate and define their own destinies. There is much interest in this approach among development organizations working on the ground. However, in contrast to the level of interest, many organizations have only a vague idea of what community radio is or how it might support them in their work. They are intuitively aware of the potential, but do not really know how to make use of it.

For the population in general, radio has traditionally been the voice of authority. There is no tradition of radio as a democratic, participatory medium that can be used to satisfy the needs of local communities. While community-based radio has a tremendous potential to contribute to Afghanistan's development, there is a need to create awareness and provide orientation on ways to use community-based media to support development, democracy and social participation among development agencies and Afghan people. A seminar series would help start this process.

The report's main conclusion is that community radio is not only a viable option for Afghanistan, it is also a low-cost and effective way of contributing to medium and long-term efforts for reconstruction, development, democracy and nation-building. Community radio can be the missing link in a three-tiered public-service radio system made up of national, regional and local radio stations. Recommendations deal with awareness of community radio, legal issues, governance, technology, and coordination of activities.

I. Introduction

The past quarter of a century has been difficult for Afghan society. Invasions, civil wars, drought and famine, repressive governments, oppression of women and the systematic violation of human rights have had significant social and cultural consequences. The country is isolated, its communications infrastructures virtually non-existent, and its education system devastated.

Afghan media have not been immune. Authoritarianism, censorship, intimidation and exclusion have been the norm. In recent years, the Taliban outlawed television and the Internet and banned music. However, while they took media suppression to new heights, the Taliban were merely building on the foundation of a quarter century of official intolerance. Traditions of independent media in Afghanistan are virtually non-existent.

In the less than a year since the Taliban were forced out of government in November 2001, the situation of the media has been constantly changing. Shortly after the interim government passed a law authorizing independent newspapers, they began to appear on the streets of Kabul, many of them started by Afghans with initial investments of no more than a few hundred dollars.

In a country with 70 per cent illiteracy (85 per cent among women), a largely rural population and devastated transportation, communication and electrical infrastructures, radio has much more potential than print media. Since the fall of the Taliban, the international community has come to the assistance of Radio Afghanistan, providing equipment, technical assistance and training to help rebuild the Kabul-based national broadcaster and to begin the work of transforming it into a modern national public service broadcast network.

Since February 2002, Afghan law has permitted independent radio stations and the government has invited applications for both commercial and community radio broadcast licences. During a meeting with UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura in January, Afghan President Karzai "not only gave his full support to the establishment of independent media, but also his commitment to the diversification of media outlets, including the development of community radio".¹ At the time of writing, no licensed independent stations have appeared on the country's airwaves, although one independent station is being permitted to broadcast even though it has not yet formalised its licence.

Many Afghan and international NGOs and development agencies have expressed interest in supporting radio initiatives in Afghanistan. A few of these are already working on the ground, providing training, equipment, facilities and advice. Their interests and (potential) activities can be divided into two broad categories:²

1. Those that support the professionalization of the medium, with activities such as training journalists, producing quality independent current affairs programmes for broadcast on existing stations, and supporting efforts to transform Radio-Television Afghanistan to a national public service broadcaster;

¹ UNESCO Director-General's address to the International Seminar on Promoting Independent and Pluralistic Media in Afghanistan, September 3, 2002.

² A few organisations, such as the BBC, have activities in both areas.

2. Those that emphasise radio's potential as a support for reconstruction and development initiatives, with activities such as producing educational programmes and supporting development-oriented radio initiatives.

To date most of the effort has gone into activities in the first category and activities have been led by organisations with particular interest and expertise in media. Our discussions with a wide range of people involved in development-focused activities, such as health, education, agriculture and rural development, indicate that there is considerable interest in radio as a support for development and grassroots empowerment.

This study, sponsored by the Communication Assistance Foundation (CAF/SCO), a Dutch NGO, examines the potential for community-based radio in Afghanistan, takes some tentative first steps at describing what it might be like, and offers some recommendations for future activities. These recommendations are directed at a variety of actors, including those with activities on the ground (government ministries, NGOs, UN agencies) and those considering undertaking or supporting such activities in the future, whether with funds or expertise.

Given the broad mandate and brief timeframe of this study, it was not possible to travel to locations where stations might be established. Information on the interests and needs of the primary stakeholders, Afghans living in communities where stations might be established, is based on interviews with secondary sources with knowledge of the communities.

Structure of the report

This report first looks at what community radio is, identifying three over-arching characteristics that all community radio stations have in common: these are *community-based*, *independent*, and *participatory*. A number of examples of how community radio can support initiatives for community development are provided.

The next section provides some selected background to put community radio, and the present study, in context. We first look at the various groupings of actors involved in media development in Afghanistan and their broadly-defined interests. The picture



that emerges illustrates the sensitive nature of media in Afghanistan and hints at the complexities of the policy-making process in the current environment.

This background section also looks at some of the difficulties the country faces, including low levels of skills and education among the population and poor communication and transportation infrastructure, all of which make media and communications projects both more essential and more difficult. Keeping these factors in mind will help with understanding both the present report and the role that community broadcasting might play in the country.

Following that we look at the developing media landscape, including the legislative and regulatory context that is critical to the

development of community broadcasting and has been marked by both positive developments and setbacks over the past year. This section also provides an inventory of existing Afghan media, with a particular focus on radio, showing a picture in which there are many positive initiatives at the national level and in major cities, but little attention paid to community-based media and rural areas.

The final section analyses the data in the report, focusing on a number of key questions regarding the potential for community radio: Is community radio a viable option for Afghanistan? What would it sound like? How would it fit into the national public-service radio system? What type of governance structure could ensure a station was both responsive to its community and independent? Is it necessary to wait until the legal and regulatory framework is in place? This section also examines more closely some possible next steps for the development of community radio.

The recommendations compiled at the end of the report are directed at a wide variety of actors, including those with activities on the ground (government ministries, NGOs, UN agencies) and those considering undertaking or supporting such activities in the future, whether with funds or expertise.



II. What is community radio?

Community radio is a social process or event in which members of the community associate together to design programmes and produce and air them, thus taking on the primary role of actors in their own destiny, whether this be for something as common as mending fences in the neighbourhood, or a community-wide campaign on how to use clean water and keep it clean, or agitation for the election of new local leaders.

The emphasis is on the ownership of democratic and development efforts by the members of the community themselves and the use of media, in this case radio, to achieve it. In every sense, this is participatory communication... It is above all a process, not a technology, not merely a means...

[It is] the community speaking to each other and acting together for common goals.³

There is no single definition of community radio and there are almost as many models as there are stations. Each community radio station is a hybrid, a unique communication process shaped by a few over-arching characteristics and by the distinct culture, history, and reality of the community it serves. Among the characteristics that all community radio stations have in common are that they are *community-based, independent and participatory*.

Community-based: The station is based in its community and accountable to it. Usually the community is defined geographically, although its size can range from a small town, to a city, or a vast rural area covering thousands of square kilometres. Stations can also serve particular communities of interest such as women, youth or linguistic and cultural minorities.

The legal owner of a community radio station is a local not-for-profit organisation, such as an NGO, educational institution, cultural association, municipality, or a partnership of such associations.

The policies and objectives of a community radio station are articulated with a strong input from stakeholders within the community.

Independent: A community radio station is independent of government, donors advertisers or other institutions. This does not mean that it does not have official relations with these institutions or that it cannot receive funding from them, but the nature of their relations must be governed by clear and transparent agreements that guarantee the non-partisan community-service nature of the radio project, while operating within the boundaries defined by the law and by the constitution/guiding principles of the station.

The station exists to serve its community and thus cannot be independent of the community itself. Transparent governance structures, such as an elected board of governors, ensure that the station is responsive to community needs and interests.

Participatory: Community participation can be exercised in a wide variety of ways depending on the specific nature of the station, its objectives, and the characteristics of the community. The community must be able to participate in the management

³ Carlos Arnaldo, quoted in *Community Radio Handbook* by Colin Fraser and Sonia Restrepo, UNESCO, Paris 2001.

and direction of the station, for example through a board of governors with members representing various interests within the community. It must also be able to take part in the programming through the use of participatory production formats that encourage, for example, programme production by organisations from within the community, the broadcasting of public forums and the free and open exchange of views. In many cases the community supplies the building the station is housed in, even contributing its own "sweat capital" to build it.

Participatory radio allows long-neglected people to be heard and to participate in the democratic process. Having a say in decisions that shape their lives will ultimately improve their living standards.

* * *

What can a community radio station do in Afghanistan?

It may seem abstract to say that community radio stations contribute to social, economic, cultural and political development. Concrete examples of how participatory communications projects change their communities can be found in the books *A Passion for Radio: Radio Waves and Community*, edited by Bruce Girard, and *Making Waves: Stories of Participatory Communication for Social Change*, by Alfonso Gumucio. CD Rom versions of both books were distributed to interviewees during the mission. Both books are available on the Internet. *A Passion for Radio* is at www.comunica.org/passion/ and *Making Waves* is at www.rockfound.org.

During discussions and a public meeting in Afghanistan, people came up with many ideas for what community radio can do.

- During roundtable programmes people can make suggestions for priority reconstruction and development projects
- Interviews with agricultural experts can help introduce and evaluate new agricultural techniques
- Radio theatre, poetry and music can provide entertainment and feature local cultural initiatives
- Support and extend community-level campaigns in an almost infinite variety of subjects such as environmental awareness, tuberculosis or malaria prevention and treatment, land mines awareness, reintegration of former combatants, refugee issues, human rights...
- Personal and community announcements can be broadcast, allowing the radio station to serve as a community telephone or bulletin board
- Travelling health clinics, which often arrive in remote communities one day, wait a second day for word of their arrival to get around, and are only able to attend to people on the third day, can save considerable time by announcing their arrival in advance over the radio.
- Local authorities can be regularly interviewed to present their activities and receive feedback, thus promoting good governance and transparency
- Discussion programmes can examine the roles and rights of women and the changing nature of the family
- Local experts can provide education about health care and traditional medicines
- Provide a place for cultural exchange between communities, thus promoting understanding and peace
- And much more...

III. Background

While it is beyond the scope of this study to provide a detailed picture of all the factors at play in the development of Afghanistan's media, some background information is required. In the following pages we look briefly at the interplay between some of the key actors and interests involved in post-conflict media development.

We also look at the country's problems of human capacity and communication infrastructure – two essential ingredients for any development programme.

Actors and Interests

The politics of media support and development in Afghanistan are a microcosm of the larger politics of reconstruction and development in the country. In the larger context there are a number of actors and interests woven together into a complex pattern in which they variably overlap, diverge, conflict and act in harmony. As one foreign journalist explained, there are six centres of power in the current reconstruction and development context.⁴ They are: the Afghan government, the UN agencies, development organisations (both NGOs and official cooperation agencies), International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), regional political-military powers (often referred to as "warlords"), and the US-led Coalition Forces. To this analysis we would add a seventh, Afghan civil society.

While perhaps not yet a power on its own, civil society organizations are demonstrating impatience with being led around by the others. Throughout the years of "non-government", Afghan communities developed their own organisational forms to plan and execute community works projects, improve food security, self-defence, etc.. These are the roots of an emerging organised civil society with representative NGOs and community-based organisations.

While the individual bodies within these power centres are far from homogenous, (e.g. individual NGOs work in widely divergent areas and are guided by very different philosophies, as do different line ministries or UN agencies), their power often comes from the same sources (expertise, money, legitimacy, military, etc.) and is exercised in similar ways.

Thus, media development becomes a highly sensitive matter in a country where:

- a transitional government is struggling for legitimacy and for nationwide sovereignty – a struggle in which they must engage everyone, from warlords to UN agencies;
- the powerplay between regional and ideological factions is continuous on all levels, from backrooms, to battlegrounds, to TV screens;
- the international presence combines military, diplomatic and development actors, with often competing interests, objectives and philosophies guiding their efforts to help with reconstruction, development and the promotion of media;
- the nuclei of Afghan civil society, and its own emerging media, are reliant on external support to make their existence felt.

A few examples of the confusion and contradictions inherent in this situation include:

⁴ This analysis in this section stems from a conversation with Daphne Meijer, a Dutch journalist with expertise in Afghanistan.

- The transitional administration is focused on creating a nation-wide broadcasting network. It has to deal with regional warlords who control the media within their reach, with UN agencies that have policy expertise, with donor agencies that will decide what projects they will support, with NGOs that have technical expertise and control substantial resources, and with the Coalition Forces that are both expanding their own broadcast outlets and supporting others through their "quick impact" civil-humanitarian activities (which in turn combine military intelligence, psychological operations and humanitarian objectives in a single project).
- A section of the government has committed itself to creating conditions for a free press and independent public service broadcasting, while conservatives within the administration are keen to maintain direct political and ideological control over the media. Meanwhile a number of UN agencies, international NGO's, and Afghan NGOs and journalist associations are pressing for open media policies, institutions and programmes that promote democracy, freedom of expression, gender equality, etc. Activities include institutional assistance to ministries, capacity building, technical support, lobbying and concrete media projects.

In this example, the Ministry of Information and Culture fears losing control of the policy making process, while other actors, including Afghan civil society, resent the slow pace of government action. Concerns about how media might contribute to development are sidelined as the debate focuses on the political dimension of media policy, almost to the exclusion of the development potential.

Human capacity

Even before the wars, supply of education was never enough to meet demand. Throughout the years of conflict the situation deteriorated. Official statistics put the illiteracy rate at 65 percent but it is probably higher and at least 85 percent among women.

Millions of Afghans felt forced to leave the country. Many ended up in Pakistan and Iran, but the better-off and higher educated tended to go further away and are least eager to return. Internal displacement and a devastated education structure, aggravated by the near total exclusion of women from public life also contributed to a loss of human capital that is hard to imagine.

The massive return of refugees from neighbouring countries has put great stress on labour and housing markets. The presence of international agencies that pay salaries but do not provide sustainable jobs makes it hard for local NGO's and government to hire qualified personnel. The number of international agencies and projects is confronted with the limited capacity of Afghan society to absorb them.

Gender and Information Exclusion

In Afghanistan communications infrastructure is extremely basic, though radio ownership levels are at saturation level. Despite this, women and children often find it difficult to access and use radio, because radio listening is socially constructed as an ostensibly male activity. Women have low levels of social mobility due to the cultural constraints placed upon them by what is a strongly patriarchal society. Because of this women have fewer opportunities to engage in social communications and few opportunities to engage with media in public places. At home, domestic communications may be poor and men can monopolise the use of the radio for the serious duty of listening to news. Because little investment is made in female education women are widely perceived to be less capable or interested in economic or political issues. However, where women *do* have regular access to radio it is commonly described as a window to the outside world or as a lifeline.

Source: Andrew Skuse, *Information communication technologies, poverty and empowerment*, DFID, 2001.

In the last year hundreds of Afghans, including both working journalists and novices, have taken intense journalistic training courses offered by international NGO's. Some NGOs, aware of the limitations of their own "quick impact" projects, are planning more sustained training programmes in collaboration with Afghan universities and professional associations.

Telecommunication and Transportation Infrastructure

All of the country's infrastructures were decimated during the last quarter century of war. Kabul's old analogue landlines are virtually non-functional and people are surprised when, occasionally, a telephone rings. Minimal rollout of a new (and incompatible) digital network has begun. Only Herat has a modern functioning landline network, complete with public call booths. Afghan Wireless Communications Company (AWCC) has been operating a mobile network in Kabul since 1998. The network is functional but service is irregular and it does not have sufficient capacity to serve its 12,000 customers. Only two other cities, Herat and Mazar-I-Sharif are connected to the network. There are plans to launch services in Kandahar and Jalalabad. A second GSM network is expected to be operational in Kabul within six months, with plans for rollout in other major cities.



The Internet, banned by the Taliban, is still not formally permitted by the new government. UN agencies have satellite access to the Internet and have in turn provided connections to some NGOs (including the AINA media centre), to the Faculty of Journalism at Kabul University, and to some government ministries.⁵ There are two telecentres in Kabul, one operated by AWCC (the GSM operator) is located at the Hotel Intercontinental and the other is operated by PACTEC, an NGO that provides aviation and communication services for humanitarian NGOs. PACTEC's telecentre is for the exclusive use of NGOs. Only the UN agencies' and (we assume) the government's Internet connections are legal, with one expert describing the others as having a "very dark grey" legal status and a precarious existence.

A number of Internet Service Provider (ISP) licences awarded in the early days of the transitional government have been put on hold while the Ministry of Communication establishes its policy. Few are willing to hazard a guess as to when the policy will be approved, much less what it will be, but once approved, Internet rollout to major cities could be fairly quick. Inadequate telephone service and a general lack of computers will, of course, limit its availability.

⁵ The Ministry of Information and Culture, which has responsibility for media regulation, does not have Internet, reportedly declining one UN agency's offer of a free connection.

Communication is also adversely affected by the inadequate electrical infrastructure, which reaches only four percent of Afghan households. Even operation of HF transceivers (two-way radios) for point-to-point communication requires generators, expensive solar power, or regular transport of automobile batteries to charging points often many hours away.

Communication and transportation infrastructures must also face the challenge of Afghanistan as a largely rural country. According to some estimates, over 85 percent of the population live Afghans live in 37,000 villages.

The national postal system, variously described as being somewhere between extremely unreliable and non-existent, is supplemented by a few informal solutions.

Transportation routes, never very good, were badly damaged during the wars. Rebuilding them is a government priority, but dependent on international donors. With financing from the USA, reconstruction of the 1,100 km. Kabul-Kandahar-Herat highway, built fifty years ago and with little maintenance since, is about to begin and is expected to be completed in two years. The European Union has committed to funding the Kabul-Jalalabad highway and, according to newspaper reports other donors have committed to funding other major highway projects. Nevertheless, it will be many years before the country has a fully-functional internal road transport system.



Transportation is also adversely affected by the country's general security situation, with both ongoing military conflicts and bandits posing problems in some areas.

IV. Media in Afghanistan

The developing media landscape

The lack of communication, including roads and telephones, but especially media, is one of the important historical reasons behind the lack of an Afghan national identity. During the wars of the 1990s, much of what little media and communication existed was either destroyed or put to use to promote rather than resolve conflict. When a US bombing raid hit Radio Afghanistan's facilities, on the second day of the US attack on the Taliban, they only destroyed a Kabul radio station. The national network had already disintegrated, with regional stations destroyed or under the control of various armed factions. The BBC's Afghan service, based in Peshawar in Pakistan, was the closest thing to a "national" broadcaster.



Peshawar was also home to most Afghan print media, to its music and video producers, its journalist associations and to a number of NGOs supporting Afghan media.

In February 2002 the interim government issued a new press law. While not without its critics, the law is generally seen as a positive step, paving the way for private and community broadcasting and independent press. This was followed by a policy statement in June, proposing, among other things, an Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) to be responsible for granting broadcast licences, the transformation of Radio-Television Afghanistan (RTA) and the Bakhtar news agency into public service entities, and the removal of all licensing requirements for print media.

September's *International Seminar on Promoting Independent and Pluralistic Media in Afghanistan* confirmed and refined the June policy statement and established schedules for completion of some of the activities. The transformation of Radio-Television Afghanistan (RTA) into a public service broadcaster, for example, is to show "significant progress" by June 2004, and work is to "begin immediately...to establish an Independent Broadcast Authority to license radio and television broadcasters, equitably and pluralistically". However, in the intervening period, before the new policies are fully-developed and implemented, much will be done on an *ad hoc* basis. In October 2002, Reporters Sans Frontières' issued its worldwide press freedom index, placing Afghanistan in 104th place out of 139 in the index, comparing favourably to most of its immediate neighbours (Tajikistan #86, Pakistan #119, Uzbekistan #120, Iran #122 and Turkmenistan #136).

Over the past year, there has been a boom of media activity. Hundreds of periodicals have been registered, many with international funding. Radio Afghanistan's network is being rebuilt. Television is back in Kabul and in some other towns, although without satisfying a widespread demand for entertainment. A thriving entertainment industry has developed, marketing pictures of film stars, and (mostly illegal copies of) music and films on video and DVD. The Afghan Media and Culture Centre opened as a shared space for Afghan media and international NGOs working in media training and support. International agencies, Afghan media and the interim authority cooperated to create ways to inform nationwide about the Loya Jirga that took place

in June. The US-led coalition forces have donated transmitters and even set up their own radio stations in the provinces, while BBC and Radio Free Afghanistan/Voice of America broadcast in Kabul itself. Other than efforts aimed at extending Kabul-based media's reach, efforts to support media in the provinces is still a matter of concern. The few visible activities in this area are uneven and uncoordinated.

As we have already noted, activities in the area of radio have been primarily directed at the professionalization of the medium, with activities such as training journalists, producing quality independent current affairs programmes for broadcast on existing stations (Good Morning Afghanistan), and supporting efforts to transform Radio-Television Afghanistan to a national public service broadcaster. The BBC's Afghan Education Project has, over the past eight years, done considerable work with radio as a support for relief and development. The recently established Radio Sada-I-Solh in Jabal Saraj is also focusing much of its attention to development issues.

Taken as a whole the present media landscape is quite diverse and unregulated. However, as we have noted, the period until the new policies are in place will be marked by an *ad hoc* phase during which actors with strong military, political or financial backing can have an inordinate amount of influence.

As a result of the country's communication problems and the rapidly changing media environment there is no complete and accurate inventory of Afghan media. Indeed, even Radio Afghanistan is not certain which of the regional stations of its network are currently operating, much less what their programming is.

This inventory is based on interviews and on data supplied by Radio-Television Afghanistan, Internews, BBC Monitoring, Radio Netherlands, the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) and others. (see appendix 3)

Radio

Receivers

Radio receivers are widely available in Afghanistan. Most common are inexpensive Chinese-made battery-operated sets, capable of receiving FM, medium-wave (MW) and short-wave (SW) signals. Even in rural areas most families have access to receivers and listen to SW services of the BBC and other international broadcasters. However, among the population most at-risk there is still a shortage of receivers. One recent survey interviewed the families of women between the ages of 15 and 49 who had died in the past four years and who lived in remote areas and found that, "only 30 percent of the people interviewed had access to a radio. Because many large, poor countries often use radio to help disseminate the basic principles of health and hygiene, the low access rate means that Afghanistan's government will have difficulty getting essential health information to many Afghans in the 37,000 villages, where over 85 percent of the population lives."⁶

Over the past few years many windup radio receivers have been distributed by international organisations, but more receivers are needed before one hundred percent coverage will be attained.

⁶ Women Suffer Most in Afghan Health Crisis, Experts Say, Judith Miller and Carlotta Gall, *NY Times*, 27 October 2002.

Radio Afghanistan / Radio Kabul

Radio Kabul is the lead station of Radio Afghanistan's network, and the two entities share facilities and frequencies in Kabul, with Radio Afghanistan responsible for network programming and Radio Kabul for local. The station broadcasts to Kabul on two FM frequencies and has two functioning MW transmitters (10 kW and 50 kW). There are four to five hours of broadcasts daily on short-wave.

Radio Afghanistan has two new digital studios donated by the BBC. It also has some old but serviceable studios with mostly Soviet-era equipment. It produces most of its programming but also broadcasts *Good Morning Afghanistan* and *Good Evening Afghanistan*, programmes produced with Danish and European Commission funding by the Baltic Media Centre.



A 400 kW AM transmitter has been promised by USAID. This will be part of a package deal – the USA will actually donate two 400 kW transmitters, one of which will give Radio Afghanistan national coverage on the AM band and the other which will be used for the signal of Radio Free Afghanistan/VOA (see below). These transmitters are unlikely to be operational before May 2003.

Plans are underway to transform Radio Afghanistan from a State broadcaster into a national public service broadcaster. This is being supported at the national level by UNESCO and the BBC Trust and is due to be near completion by mid-2004. The US NGO, Internews, with support from USAID, is working directly with the provincial stations to support this initiative.

Provincial Radio Afghanistan stations

According to Radio Afghanistan 17 provincial stations are active (see list in appendix III). Seven of them have low-power (100 watts or less) transmitters. The rest range from 2 kW to 10 kW, all in the AM band. Internews has made field trips to many of the stations and reports varying technical conditions at the stations. The station in Kandahar, for example, has good on air and production studio equipment and three 10 kW transmitters – a Soviet-made transmitter in use since 1983, a backup, and a new, uninstalled, transmitter donated by the US Civilian/Military Affairs. At the other end of the scale, Radio Helmand has a 5 watt transmitter and studio equipment consists of two cheap cassette recorders and two microphones. Programmes are recorded on the cassettes and fed directly into the transmitter. Internews recently provided many of the stations with minidisk recorders and computers capable of digital editing.

Radio Afghanistan has a less clear picture of what is being broadcast on the regional stations. The country's topography combined with the complete lack of a functioning telecommunications infrastructure, means that conventional means of network programme distribution are unavailable and programming is primarily local. Where transport infrastructure and security considerations allow, tapes are occasionally delivered from Kabul to supplement local production. Communication with most stations is irregular – few stations have telephone service and transportation to many cities is difficult and irregular. There are plans to establish a satellite connection between Kabul and a few of the larger stations.

A series of field trip reports provided by Internews provides snapshots of the stations in Farah, Gardez, Ghazni, Herat, Helmand, Kandahar, Nangarhar and Nimroz. Some key points:

- Stations broadcast only a few hours per day, ranging from 2 to 5.5 hours;
- Programming is overwhelmingly, if not exclusively, locally-produced;
- Salaries, which are supposed to come from the Ministry of Information and Culture, have usually not been paid for several months. In a few instances NGOs or regional authorities have stepped in to provide salaries and other operating costs;
- Total operating costs vary from station to station. Salaries are the largest item followed by fuel for the generator. Even for the larger stations monthly operating costs do not exceed US\$2,500.
- A number of stations have women announcers;
- The quality of technical facilities varies widely from station to station
- Most stations have limited editorial autonomy, reporting regular interference from local authorities and/or local functionaries of the Ministry of Information and Culture.
- With support from various NGOs and international agencies, most stations sent journalists to cover the Loya Jirga in June. Getting their programming back to their stations was a challenge. Journalists from the Jalalabad station produced a daily tape with their reports and sent it to the station in a taxi – a five hour drive.

Independence outside Kabul

In the provinces beyond Kabul, senior officials openly admit broadcasters are tightly controlled by regional leaders. Kandahar has a nightly programme lasting two hours, but it is totally dominated by the activities of Governor Ghul Ahmed Sherzai. The finances of the station are run through an account controlled by Sherzai, according to local journalists.

In Mazar-e-Sharif, viewers are subjected to the daily activities of not one, but three competing local leaders – General Abdel Rashid Dostum, Ustad Atta and Haji Mohammad Mohaqiq – who each film their meetings with international organisations and diplomats, then send the tapes to the local TV station, which duly broadcasts them.

- Danish Kerokhel, "New Bid to Reform Media", *Afghan Recovery Report*, 17/07/22

Radio Free Afghanistan and Voice of America

Like the BBC, Radio Free Afghanistan and Voice of America (RFA/VOA – both official US radio stations) broadcast in Dari and Pashto on FM in Kabul and on short-wave to the entire country. RFA is the Afghan service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. As noted above, RFA/VOA will have a 400 kW AM transmitter operating as soon as May 2003, sending their programming to most of the country.

BBC

For much of the last quarter century BBC World Service was Afghanistan's *de facto* national broadcaster of record and it continues to have a high profile. The BBC broadcasts on FM in Kabul 24 hours per day in Dari, Pashto and English. It also continues to broadcast news and educational programming on short-wave.

In the most significant example of development-oriented radio, the BBC's Afghan Education Project has been producing educational and development-oriented programming for Afghanistan for the past eight years. Notable among its programmes is the weekly educational soap opera *New Home, New Life*, the more recent daily programme *On the Road*, which deals with the current refugee crisis, and the distance learning series *Our World, Our Future*. The Afghan Education Project has recently moved its headquarters to Kabul from Peshawar in Pakistan.

Radio Sada-I-Solh

Radio Sada-I-Solh (Radio Voice of Peace) bills itself as the only independent radio station in Afghanistan and is another significant example of a radio project that contributes a significant part of its efforts to exploring the development potential of radio. It is located in Jabal Saraj and began broadcasting with support from the French NGO, Droit de Parole, shortly before the US attacks on the Taliban. Jabal Saraj, only one hour drive from Kabul, was a Northern Alliance stronghold and the station was and is associated with the Alliance. When we visited it had been off the air for one month due to transmitter failure. When the transmitter was working the signal reached as far as Kabul. Droit de Parole has located a new transmitter and another NGO, IMPACS, is arranging shipping. It is expected to be operational in early-November 2002.

Radio Sada-I-Solh's programming is varied, with a strong emphasis on issues related to the social transformation that Afghanistan is currently experiencing – the changing nature of the family, women's rights and youth, for example. Most programming is in Dari, the first language of 75% of the local population. Important news is translated in Pashto. Most Pashto-speakers are bilingual.

The station has applied for a licence, completing the procedures required by the Ministry of Communication for allocation of a frequency and the Ministry of Information and Culture for a licence. It has received verbal approval, but the press law requires it to deposit 30 million afghanis (US\$750) with the Ministry of Information and Culture as a guarantee before the licence can be granted. They are not yet in a position to pay, but intend to continue broadcasting as soon as the new transmitter arrives. They do not expect the government to interfere since their historical right to broadcast has been established.



The station is run by the staff and is the legal property of Ms. Zakia, who is also the director.

Droit de Parole paid the station's operating costs until June of this year. While expecting hard times, the station is confident that it will be able to survive and is developing a business plan. Estimated monthly cost of operation is \$3,000, including salaries, rent for the building, fuel for the generator and transportation.

Radio Sada-I-Solh's main international supporter, Droit de Parole, does not maintain an office in Kabul. The station is working with two foreign NGOs, IMPACS from Canada and the French AINA. IMPACS is providing some financial support for specific projects, such as shipping the new transmitter from Europe. It is also helping develop a "business plan" for the station, the main element of which would involve producing and broadcasting public service messages to support various educational campaigns undertaken by NGOs and government institutions in the area. The station also hopes to benefit from an AINA project to establish an advertising agency, although until there is a critical mass of radio stations to carry the advertising, it is likely that the new agency will concentrate most of its efforts on print media.

Bamiyan

Bamiyan had its moment of fame, when, in 2001, the Taliban destroyed its two giant Buddhas carved out of a mountainside in the valley. Often referred to as a city, Bamiyan is more accurately described as a collection of small agricultural settlements. It may yet get another moment of fame, if it becomes the first place outside Kabul, with more than one radio station.

Earlier this year the NGO, IMPACS, which is planning to use radio as a key component of its projects focusing on education in its priority themes of women's development and elections, chose Bamiyan as the site of a pilot community radio project. When the staff arrived to start work, they discovered that the US-led Coalition Forces had donated a 10 kW MW transmitter three weeks earlier as part of their civil-humanitarian operations.⁷

The donated transmitter, which did not come with a budget or plan for operational costs, was claimed by the local governor, who had it installed in a government building, reportedly at the cost of the station's independence. The station was also dependent on the US military, which daily hauled a generator up to the site for the station's 45 minute broadcast.

Within three weeks the donated transmitter broke down and USAID has been left with the task of picking up the pieces, a task which involves:

1. identifying a partner organisation with the capacity to take over the station;
2. arranging a broadcast license (the Deputy Minister of Information and Culture told USAID that a license would be given informally on the basis of a letter, but until a partner organisation is identified, there is no one to sign the letter and take legal responsibility for the station);
3. equipping the station (it has a transmitter, but no studio equipment and no generator);
4. training staff; and
5. taking steps, such as preparing a "business plan", to ensure the sustainability of the station.

By all accounts the Bamiyan station is not a nefarious military psychological operation, but more a result of boredom; "the guys don't have much to do up there", we were told. Nevertheless, it is an instructive example of how not to set-up a community radio station. As a Canadian NGO, IMPACS is understandably reluctant to join what is known as a US-military project, especially one with its independence compromised from the start. Other agencies reported the same hesitation. At the same time, IMPACS is also unlikely to continue with its original plan to establish a community radio station, since two stations are probably more than Bamiyan can support.

ISAF

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) currently led by Turkey, operates Radio Turkiyem, an FM station, from Bagram air base just outside Kabul. The station is clearly received throughout the city. Reportedly a second ISAF station, operated by

⁷ Coalition forces have created the Coalition Joint Civil-Military Operations Task Force (CJCMOTK) to deal with civil-humanitarian operations executed by the military. These operations, which consist of so-called quick impact projects such as rehabilitation of schools or clinics have been sharply criticised by both UN agencies and NGOs for, among other reasons, blurring the distinction between military operations and humanitarian aid, for using humanitarian aid as a cover for military activity, and for not being coordinated with the actions of aid organisations working on the ground.

German forces and with programming in Dari and Pashto began operation on FM in August. We were unable to locate its signal or otherwise confirm its existence.

Coalition Forces

The US-led Coalition Forces are operating a MW station known as Information Radio. They also have a frequency-sharing arrangement with at least one regional station. Radio Kandahar broadcasts five hours per day of local programming. When it goes off the air a transmitter on the nearby military base takes over on the same frequency, thus providing 24 hour a day programming.

Radio Voice of Afghan Women

According to UNESCO, which is donating a 300 watt FM transmitter and studio equipment, the Voice of Afghan Women is supposed to be on the air in early November 2002. UNESCO expects the station, and the Kabul University station (see below) will receive licences quickly. We were not able to find much information about this project. The station's initiator and future director, Jamila Mujahed, was out of the country. Many people we interviewed had heard of the project, but nobody had details of what was planned and many were sceptical that it would actually go ahead.

Faculty of Journalism, Kabul University

Also supported by UNESCO, the radio and television Department of the Faculty of Journalism of the University of Kabul, is awaiting studio equipment and a 300 watt FM transmitter in October or November 2002. Plans are to use the station primarily for training students and secondarily as a "Campus Plus" radio station, for youth, students and residents of the area surrounding the university.

Others

At least three other radio projects are in more-or-less advanced stages of preparation:

1. A group of Afghan-Australians have put together financing and reportedly received a license for the country's first commercial radio station, to start broadcasting in Kabul shortly;
2. Afghans for Civil Society, a US-based group of Afghan expatriates, is planning a community radio station in Kandahar;
3. The nomadic Kochi people are negotiating a grant from the World Bank to establish a travelling radio station that would accompany them on their seasonal journeys between the north and south of the country.



Communication problems make it difficult to know what is going on outside of major cities. There are unconfirmed reports of broadcasting activities in smaller towns, although no information as to whether they might be independent and spontaneous community initiatives, or the activities of political or military formations.

Television

Television is back in Kabul and in some other towns, without satisfying a widespread demand for entertainment among the population. There are rudimentary stations in Jalalabad, Mazaar-I-Sharif, Faizabad, Kabul and Herat.

Print

With more than 100 periodical publications in Kabul alone, Afghanistan might be seen as having a lively press. However, the vast majority of the publications are limited interest government publications, NGO newsletters and partisan mouthpieces. There are, however, the beginnings of a more engaging press with a few better-quality newspapers and magazines now circulating. While, as one journalist said, "it is impossible for a newspaper to be independent in Afghanistan", some of the more crudely partisan papers have already stopped publishing, while some of the better ones are getting better and increasing their circulation.

News agencies

The Bakhtar News Agency is the official news agency. It has offices throughout the country and distributes news for print and broadcast media. Its independence is highly questionable but the government's policy is to transform Bakhtar into a public service entity, just as it is doing with RTA.

A second agency, Hindu Kush, was recently set up as an independent alternative to Bakhtar. Reportedly some of Hindu Kush's best correspondents are Bakhtar journalists who provide the new agency with the news that they cannot distribute via Bakhtar.

Internet

The Internet, banned by the Taliban, is still not formally permitted by the new government. UN agencies, a few NGOs (including the AINA media centre), the Faculty of Journalism at Kabul University, and some government ministries have access. There are two small telecentres in Kabul, but they are very expensive relative to Afghan salaries.

A number of Internet Service Provider (ISP) licences awarded in the early days of the transitional government have been put on hold while the Ministry of Communication establishes its policy. Few are willing to hazard a guess as to when the policy will be approved, much less what it will be, but once approved, Internet rollout to major cities could be fairly quick. Inadequate telephone service and a general lack of computers will, of course, limit its availability.

While there are many Internet sites with Afghan news, information, literature and music, including a number in national languages, most are by and for the Afghan Diaspora. The Internet is not and will not become a mass medium in Afghanistan for many years. Nevertheless, once basic connectivity is available in major cities, Afghan media will be able to make use of it to research, to make content available to the large Afghan Diaspora, to network among themselves, and to establish community multimedia centres. Radio Reed Flute is one project that is seeking to use the Internet and radio to link the Diaspora with local Afghan communities.⁸

⁸ See www.radioreedflute.net. For a more general article about how radio stations use the Internet to network among themselves, research information for their programmes, or to connect with the Diaspora, see Girard's article, [Mixing Media: The Internet's Real Next Generation](#) at comunica.org/pubs/mixingmedia.pdf.

V. Community radio in Afghanistan: Some questions and tentative answers

This final section analyzes the data presented in the previous sections as well as other information gathered during interviews, feedback received at meetings held to discuss and critique our preliminary findings in Kabul (October 17) and Peshawar (October 22), and email correspondence following the mission. This section also proposes some possible next steps for the development of community radio.



Participants at the Oct. 17 meeting in Kabul

Before proceeding with our analysis, it will be useful to ask whether there is a role for community radio in Afghanistan and whether current conditions are sufficient to justify pursuing it as an option. We believe that the answers to both these questions are positive.

In a mountainous country, with a mostly rural population, seventy percent illiteracy rate and in which only four percent of the population are connected to the electricity grid, radio is without a doubt the only mass medium capable of reaching the majority of the population in the foreseeable future. Afghans have radio receivers and are accustomed to using radio as a source of news, information, and entertainment. While the tradition of radio in the country is one in which it has represented the (often foreign) voice of authority, oral traditions are also strong. Poets and storytellers are plentiful and, given the chance, they will readily contribute to transforming radio into a participatory medium.

Community radio has a tremendous potential as an educational medium and as a support for diffusion of innovations related to areas such as health and agriculture. It can also be used for personal and community messages – a vital service to the 85 percent of Afghans who live in rural areas, since few of them will have access to telephones or even a postal service. The box on page five lists only a few of the ways that community radio can contribute to development and democracy in Afghanistan. There are many others.

Based on our experience with community radio in other countries and on our survey of dozens of key individuals and organizations working in Afghanistan, **we believe that community radio is not only viable, but that it is a low-cost and effective way of contributing to medium and long-term efforts for reconstruction, development, democracy and nation-building.**

How will community radio fit in the public radio system?

Community radio can provide the missing link in a three-tiered public-service radio system made up of national, regional and local community radio stations.

1. At the national level, an independent public broadcasting network with programming produced in Kabul and various provincial centres throughout the country and available in all regions.
2. At the regional level, public service radio stations carrying a mix of programming from the region and from the national network. All parts of the country should be able to receive at least one regional signal.

3. At the community level, independent community-owned and community-service broadcasters. Programming, which might be aired for only a few hours per day, will be primarily locally-produced. The size of the community to be served by a community radio station (and thus the definition of "local") can range from a single town to a sparsely populated area of a thousand square kilometres or more.

While the national and regional tiers will be administratively responsible to the national government, community stations will be directly responsible to locally-selected governance bodies. (See below – *How can community radio be independent and responsive?*)

Who is interested in community radio?

Everyone we spoke with – Afghan journalists, representatives of NGOs and UN agencies, personnel from government ministries (see appendices 2 and 4) – was supportive of the idea of community radio. President Karzai himself, as we noted in the introduction to this report, has given his commitment to the development of community radio. While in an interview the Deputy Minister of Information and Culture, would only say, "we will study the matter", in practice he and his ministry have shown themselves to be very open to the idea, granting a license to Radio Sada-I-Solh and promising that requests from Radio Voice of Afghan Women, the Faculty of Journalism of the University of Kabul and Bamiyan will be expedited.

To date a lot of work has gone into training of (mostly print) journalists and the professionalization of the media. On the other hand, UN agencies and relief and development NGO's are looking for ways to reach their target audiences with more specific content. From both sides we received comments on the timeliness of this mission. The challenge lies in bringing the two overall approaches together.

UNESCO and a few NGOs are already taking steps to help establish and support community-based stations. UNICEF, in cooperation with WHO and the Ministry of Education, is producing educational radio programmes on women and health issues that they would like to have broadcast on community radio stations. FAO and UN Habitat both expressed interest in including community radio projects in their future activities. Not surprisingly, the media-oriented NGOs, such as AINA, Media Action International, the Baltic Media Centre and IMPACS, were the most advanced in their thinking and plans for community radio. Afghan media organizations, such as the Afghan Centre for the Promotion of Communication (ACPC) and Kabul University's Faculty of Journalism are also interested and looking for ways to contribute.

Contrasting with this obvious interest, most organizations working on the ground have not yet developed a communications strategy. Many have only a vague idea of what community radio is or how it might support them in their work. They are intuitively aware of the potential of local radio, but they do not really know how to make use of it.

When we explained the concept of community radio to them, relief and development-oriented organizations, such as HealthNet International, FAO, UN Habitat and ACBAR, expressed strong interest in exploring the theme further. However, work will have to be done with these organizations before they will adopt an active role. In particular, **publications, seminars and similar activities should be organized to create awareness and provide orientation for development agencies so they can understand and use community-based media to support their work.**

What type of local radio for Afghanistan?

At this very early stage in its planning, two approaches to local radio are emerging.⁹ Both are public-service approaches, since outside of a few major cities, commercial radio will not be a viable option in the foreseeable future. However, they differ in the type of resources, training and other support they require.

The first, concerned with the professionalization of radio, seeks to expand the public service model downwards from the national and regional stations to support the establishment of stations in towns and cities, including in provincial capitals where they would compete with existing Radio Afghanistan stations. Similar to Radio Sada-I-Solh, these would be local versions of traditional radio, with professional journalists and presenters and familiar programming formats and content. They would be independent, but it is unclear how they would differ from Radio Afghanistan's provincial stations, once they become true public service stations. This *professionalization approach* is the one usually considered by many of the agencies and NGOs that have a traditional mass media focus.

The second is a more bottom up approach, in which stations would be based in grassroots civil society formations in smaller communities. In this *grassroots approach* stations would not be staffed with professional journalists or presenters, but with "communicators" from the community. They would adopt programming formats and contents that respond to development objectives and *community service* requirements as established by community members themselves. The emphasis is on communication as a two-way social process, on democratic ownership and control of local development efforts, and on enabling people to debate and define their own destinies.

While this approach has been used elsewhere with success, it has not been tried in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, it was enthusiastically supported by many of the development workers we spoke with, including staff within the Ministry of Agriculture and personnel responsible for the National Solidarity Programme which is jointly administered by the Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation Development and UN Habitat (see box – *National Solidarity Programme – Building Communities*).

In addition to its ability to involve people as primary actors in their own development, the grassroots approach to radio involves people in a more natural way, enabling them to build on and develop their own natural skills as communicators.

Seen in the context of a three-tiered public broadcasting system described above, **the professionalization approach is most appropriate for the task of transforming existing national and provincial stations into public service broadcasters, and the grassroots approach is best-suited to new stations serving smaller communities.**

Most of the media-development NGOs working in Afghanistan have expertise in providing support, such as training of journalists, for traditional media, but few if any have significant experience with grassroots community communication or with broader development issues. At the same time the development agencies, which are most interested in making use of grassroots community radio, have little communication experience. This overall lack of expertise is a serious impediment to the future development of community radio. **NGOs with specialized knowledge and**

⁹ These should not be seen as competing approaches, since in reality both have elements of the other and they are complementary in that one focuses on the national and regional levels and the other on local grassroots activities.

information about community radio should be invited to contribute in an advisory role. The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) has many members with experience in such areas as community radio for development and community radio in post-conflict situations. Within Asia, groups such as Tambuli, based in the Philippines but with experience in places such as East Timor, could also be called on for advice and support.

Is there a grassroots demand for community radio?

While in the most remote areas and among the poorest sectors of the population there are people without radio receivers, they are generally widely available in Afghanistan and even in rural areas most families have access to a multi-band (FM, MW, SW) receiver and are accustomed to using it. They learn from it, it is an important source of news and information about their country and their world, it reflects and reinforces national culture, and it is a source of entertainment.

We could not find any thorough studies of the communication and information needs of Afghan villagers and farmers, although the preliminary findings of a listener's survey by the Baltic Media Centre (BMC) reveals a demand for local information and entertainment on the radio. Comments received from experts at the Ministry of Agriculture, UN Habitat, UNAMA and others support the BMC findings. It is worth mentioning here that **there is a general lack of knowledge and information about communication needs and practices in Afghan rural communities and a need for research initiatives to support participatory development initiatives.**

As we have noted, radio's traditional role in Afghanistan has been as the voice of authority. There is no tradition of radio as a democratic, participatory medium that can be used to satisfy the needs of local communities. It should not, therefore, be surprising that there is no groundswell of popular demand for community radio – few people have heard of it and few have ever imagined radio as anything other than a vehicle for official voices. As with the development organizations mentioned above, **there is a need to create awareness and provide orientation on ways to use community-based media to**

Radio Road Show

One way of creating awareness of and exploring the concept of participatory radio to local communities around Afghanistan could be a *Radio Road Show* – a travelling radio station that would visit towns and villages and produce and broadcast radio programmes on the spot.

The project would require a vehicle, a portable radio studio, a low-power FM transmitter, loudspeakers, a generator and a crew consisting of a programme manager, a technician, and two producer/hosts with training skills.

The crew would arrive in a community, install the studio in a public space, and hold an open meeting to explain and demonstrate the concept and to invite people to participate. They would then collect information on local history and current issues, record interviews with key personalities and ordinary people and invite people to prepare their own cultural presentations, such as music, poetry or stories. Recording and editing would take place in a public place. A magazine-format programme presenting a lively snapshot of community life, its history and the challenges it faces would be produced and then broadcast, both on the mobile transmitter and via the loudspeakers.

This would produce a wealth of experience, and information on how communities respond to, adopt and adapt radio. For the community it would offer an opportunity to explore how radio can be linked with local needs, providing entertainment while identifying problems and discussing solutions in dialogue with development workers with specialized knowledge.

Radio celebrities, such as actors from the BBC's *New Home New Life*, and journalism and communication students could be part of the radio road show team. Edited versions of the programmes could even be broadcast on Radio Afghanistan's national network, providing Afghans with a wealth of knowledge about other communities in their country.

Projects similar to this have been used by the Mahaweli Community Radio project in Sri Lanka and by Tambuli in the Philippines.

support development and democracy and social participation among the population in general. One way of doing this could be via a travelling radio station, a small portable studio and transmitter that would visit villages for one to two weeks. (see box – *Radio Road Show*)

Although most Afghan families own a radio receiver, listening to it is often socially constructed as a male activity. Women and youth often find it difficult to use the radio. **Efforts to promote the use of radio's developmental potential must actively seek to involve women and youth as listeners by, for example, encouraging the establishment of women's radio listening groups.**

What kind of programming would it have?

Community radio programming would likely be a mix of educational programmes, cultural programmes, entertainment and messages.

Educational programmes can be either centrally-produced on behalf of, for example, government ministries (health, agriculture, rural development) or NGOs, or they can be locally produced. Examples of the latter might be an interview with a local doctor, midwife, farmer or school teacher.

Programmes featuring the community's own cultural production are often at the core of a community radio station's programming. They can include story-telling, music, poetry and other forms.

Entertainment is scarce in rural areas and an essential therapy, especially in a post-traumatic situation like Afghanistan.

While community radio does not have a primarily journalistic mission, it does provide news and information that is relevant to its listeners including local perspectives on national events, local news, and information on market conditions, availability of services and so on. Especially in times of crisis community radio can play a vital role as the trusted medium of the people.



Personal and community messages, including such things as birth and death announcements, notices of lost sheep, meeting convocations and simple greetings are one of the most useful forms of programming, often taking up hours of programming every day. They can also be a source of income, contributing to a station's sustainability.

Will the legal and policy framework allow it?

While the government of Afghanistan has announced its policy proposals governing the licensing of independent radio, both commercial and community, it has not yet provided the details of that policy or established the Independent Broadcast Authority (IBA) that will be mandated to decide on license applications. Full implementation could take as long as two years. An important question arising from this is whether community radio projects should wait until the new policies and the IBA are in place, or whether there is a reasonable guarantee that if they proceed now, they will have permission to broadcast once the policy framework is in place.

The Ministry of Information and Culture, currently responsible for broadcast licensing, is open to granting new licenses in this interim period and licenses have reportedly been granted or promised for Radio Sada-I-Solh, the Bamiyan station, the station at the Faculty of Journalism and Radio Voice of Afghan Women. Given this readiness to grant licenses without having the policies fully in place, **when a station is ready to begin serious planning, it should contact the Ministry of Information and Culture to formalize its request for permission to broadcast, rather than wait until the new policies and licensing body are in place.** The policy statements are unequivocal – independent radio, including community radio, will be licensed – and it is highly unlikely that a station granted permission to broadcast now will have that permission revoked later.

The situation in the provinces is more complex. While under Afghan law awarding permission to broadcast falls under central government jurisdiction, in parts of the country it will also be necessary to win the approval of regional authorities, which have fewer policies and policy statements in place than the central government. Depending on the location of a proposed radio station, regional requirements may require obtaining permission from regional authorities. **Applicants should not be tempted to skip what may seem to be unnecessary central government requirements, since sooner or later Kabul will exert its authority over broadcasting and its approval will be required.**

The importance of developing and implementing a new policy framework for the central government, including the promised Independent Broadcasting Authority, can not be understated. Legal guarantees will be essential if the stations are to retain their independence and to be sustainable. **The international community must continue to support the Afghan government in its efforts to develop and implement transparent policies for licensing and regulation of broadcasting and to ensure that the policies specifically recognize and stimulate community-based broadcasting.**

How can community radio be independent and responsive?

Legal guarantees, such as a licence, are a necessary but not sufficient condition for independence. Like other public media, community radio stations must be independent of government, donors, advertisers and other institutions. They will, of course, maintain relations with these institutions and often even are dependent on them for permission to broadcast, funding, or other things, but the nature of their relations must be governed by clear and transparent agreements that guarantee the non-partisan community-service nature of the radio station, while operating within the boundaries defined by the law. Thus, independence is more a governance issue than a legal one.

Community radio stations exist to serve their communities and thus must be responsive to community needs and interests. Transparent governance instruments can help ensure this responsiveness.

The precise nature of these governance instruments will depend on the community itself but, as a starting point they should include:

- a broadly-supported declaration of principles, drafted in consultation with the community;
- a representative board of directors.

The declaration of principles should commit the station to being non-partisan, being opposed to discrimination on the basis of language, ethnicity, religious beliefs and

gender, being committed to peace and respect for human rights, and so on. The board of directors, whose members should reflect the diversity of the community, would be made up of representatives of various constituencies such as farmers organizations, women's groups, cultural organizations, health workers or teachers.

The process for selecting the board members will vary from community to community, but **it is advisable to take the experience of the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), jointly administered by UN Habitat and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, as a model** (see box below, *National Solidarity Programme – Building Communities*). The NSP starts with traditional structures in the community, and then seeks to broaden them (involving women, for example) and to formalize them into *community forums* with capacity to actively plan rather than merely react to crises, as many existing structures do. Usually these *community forums* are very local, representing only a few dozen families, and are thus too small to justify a community radio project. However, the NSP's higher level of organization, the *Community Forum Development Organization* (CFDO) brings together a number of forums from a single district, and could serve as a model or even as the institutional home of a community radio station.

The NSP has paid special attention to the involvement of women in the community forums and CFDOs. Like the NSP, **community radio must ensure that women and youth are represented in the governance bodies and that their concerns are reflected in the declaration of principles.**

The NSP has expressed interest in introducing community radio as a theme for consideration by the community forums and CFDOs. Community radio projects should seek to develop close relations with the NSP and similar community empowerment initiatives.

National Solidarity Programme – Building Communities

Especially in a conflict situation, the process of enabling people to come together, to engage in productive activities for the common good, to establish and fund services essential to community welfare, to consult together in a harmonious environment has been a key determinant in the establishment of a lasting peace.

The National Solidarity Programme started in 1994 as a process to consult with local communities on ways to address their needs and to create a structure wherein relief organisations could effectively become partners in a process of community building, empowerment and development.

The methodology begins with a series of public meetings in a community, each one involving a wider circle of participants, especially women. The first aim is to create a space where differing interests and opinions can be expressed. Then this wider space is formalized into a broad *Community Forum* with a *Consultative Board* that eventually takes on the role of a local legislature. The Forum and the Board then decide, in dialogue with the broader community and with external agencies, on the priorities and design of concrete projects.

The success of the programme has been in its ability to draw on traditional decision-making structures of the community, most notably the *shura* (local council of elders), to broaden them out to involve women and youth, and to formalize them in such a way that instead of reacting to crises as the *shura's* do, they act proactively, anticipating problems and planning community works.

The programme, which began in urban neighbourhoods, has been successfully run in rural areas. Community Forums have also formed regional networks, creating a second layer of consensus building and self-governance.

To date the programme has established some 80 forums. It is jointly administered by UN Habitat and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. With support from the World Bank it is now preparing for a major expansion, with the aim of establishing a community forum in every village and neighbourhood in the country. In the coming year, 800 new forums are to be established.

Often overlooked, but key to the success of any endeavour is the day to day process of women and men living their daily lives. Amongst all the chaos and confusion there is a quiet energy finding expression in the day to day affairs of ordinary people as they make ends meet (or nearly). It is this life that the project sought to understand and build on. What troubled them? What did they think was the specific problem to be addressed? In consultation after consultation what surfaced as the resounding problem were the lack of unity between people, which led to factionalism, discrimination and prejudice. In addition, the lack of coherence between the different assistance programs, their design and methods of implementation and lack of co-operation as they compete for funds, beneficiaries and status.

Rarely was the patient consulted. Too often prescriptions in the form of project documents were more like screenplays for the assistance actors to perform before donors to raise more funds for the next script. People however were not helpless, and on closer examination one can witness a diversity of coping mechanisms.

*Italicized text abbreviated from *Rebuilding communities in the urban areas of Afghanistan*, Samantha Reynolds, UN Habitat Symposium and Round Table on Operational Activities, June 1999.*

What broadcast technology?

Commercial radio stations will always be FM. It is cheaper technology, offers better quality sound, and easily reaches people living in cities – the target audience of commercial radio.

Medium-wave transmitters are more expensive but their signals usually carry further, especially in hilly areas, and serve rural populations better. Afghanistan is a largely rural and mountainous and rural populations are most likely to benefit from the communication and development possibilities offered by community radio.

Where an FM station could serve a village or a valley, AM might serve a number of villages as well as people living in the countryside, even in relatively mountainous terrain.

To date, UN agencies and NGOs are focusing exclusively on FM broadcast technology. While FM offers short-term cost advantages and may be an appropriate solution, depending on topography and on the physical distribution of the community to be served, it would be a mistake to automatically choose it without first doing basic engineering studies and carefully evaluating the costs and benefits of each technology.



The Internet

The Internet is still not formally permitted by the new government, with access being available only via expensive satellite systems that are inaccessible to almost all Afghans. Once the government's new Internet policy is approved, roll-out to major cities could follow quickly. However, factors such as inadequate infrastructure, mountainous geography, spread out rural population, high illiteracy rate and general lack of knowledge of major languages used on the Internet, will mean that Afghanistan will continue to be one of the world's "least connected countries" for years to come.

As new technologies and combinations of technologies make affordable rural Internet possible, connecting community radio stations should be a priority.¹⁰

Community radio stations can make use of the Internet for networking with other stations and they can become community multimedia centres, incorporating Internet content in their programmes and providing communities with access and expertise.¹¹

Coordination

Perhaps, in an ideal situation, a programme to establish community radio in Afghanistan would be led by a single organization or consortium, coordinating research, pilot projects, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and using common methodologies and objectives and agreed timelines. However, the current situation in Afghanistan is far from ideal. A large number of actors are conducting a variety of often overlapping media and development activities, often with different objectives, always with different methodologies, and in a by-and-large uncoordinated fashion.

The bright side of this is that the experience that is being gained, if taken as a whole, is extremely rich and diverse. The risk is that without coordination of activities and sharing of experiences, opportunities for evaluation and learning will be lost. There is some informal coordination going on among the NGOs specialized in media, UNESCO, and the Ministry of Information and Culture. However, agencies and ministries focusing on development, whose input and participation will be essential if radio is to be used to address development problems, remain out of the loop. **A forum bringing together media development organisations, representatives from development agencies and ministries, and community radio practitioners could help to strengthen the links between development efforts and community radio.** It would support exchange of information, coordination of activities, policy monitoring, evaluation and stimulation of community-based media. **A seminar or seminar series on community media and development would offer a starting point for the creation of such a forum.**

A second problem, which we referred to under the heading *Actors and Interests* in the *Background* section of this report, is the danger that the capacity of NGOs and UN agencies to provide advice and support exceeds the capacity of Afghans to absorb that advice and support. If this happens, leadership of any community radio initiative will remain in the hands of donors and foreign NGOs, instead of being transferred to Afghan communities, compromising the long-term sustainability of the project. **Attention must be paid to the development of indigenous leadership capacity in the community radio sector. This may eventually lead to the establishment of an Afghan association of radio stations, producers and projects to: promote and develop new community media; facilitate exchanges of programmes, experience and personnel; coordinate lobbying; and encourage networking, international partnerships, capacity building and sharing of knowledge and resources.**

¹⁰ One example is the combination of the WorldSpace high capacity but unidirectional satellite with a low-capacity, bi-directional LEO (low earth orbiting satellite) operated by the US NGO Volunteers in Technical Assistance (VITA). The combination allows a station to send text requests via the VITA system and to receive large amounts of data, including multimedia content, via the WorldSpace satellite.

¹¹ See *Mixing Media: The Internet's Real Next Generation*, at <http://comunica.org/pubs/mixingmedia.pdf>

VI. Recommendations

General

1. Community radio is not only a viable option for Afghanistan, it is also a low-cost and effective way of contributing to medium and long-term efforts for reconstruction, development, democracy and nation-building. Community radio can be the missing link in a three-tiered public-service radio system made up of national, regional and local radio stations.

This is the overall conclusion of the fact finding mission to Afghanistan in October 2002. Developing the concept of community radio in the present conditions of Afghanistan is a process that requires a commitment by all players involved with media and community development. The following recommendations are the fruits of animated exchanges and findings on the ground, and based on our previous experiences with social communication for development and democracy.

Awareness

2. Publications, a seminar series and other similar activities should be organized to create awareness and provide orientation for development agencies so they can understand and use community-based media to support their work.
3. The professionalization approach is most appropriate for the task of transforming existing national and provincial stations into public service broadcasters. The grassroots approach is best-suited to new stations serving smaller communities.
4. There is a general lack of knowledge and information about communication needs and practices in Afghan rural communities and a need for research initiatives to support participatory development initiatives.
5. There is a need to create awareness and provide orientation on ways to use community-based media for social change, development and political participation among the population in general.
6. Efforts to promote the use of radio's developmental potential must actively seek to involve women and youth as listeners by, for example, encouraging the establishment of women's radio listening groups.
7. NGOs with specialized knowledge of community radio should be invited to contribute in an advisory role.

Legal

8. When a station is ready to begin serious planning, it should contact the Ministry of Information and Culture to formalize its request for permission to broadcast, rather than wait until the new policies and licensing body are in place.
9. Applicants should not be tempted to skip what may seem to be unnecessary central government requirements, since sooner or later Kabul will exert its authority over broadcasting and its approval will be required.
10. The international community must continue to support the Afghan government in its efforts to develop and implement transparent policies for licensing and

regulation of broadcasting and to ensure that the policies specifically recognize and stimulate community-based broadcasting.

Governance

11. Community radio stations exist to serve their communities and thus must be responsive to community needs and interests. Transparent governance instruments can help ensure this responsiveness.
12. The precise nature of these governance instruments will depend on the community itself but, as a starting point they should include a broadly-supported declaration of principles, drafted in consultation with the community and a representative board of directors.
13. Special care must be taken to ensure that women and youth are represented in the governance bodies and that their concerns are reflected in the declaration of principles.
14. It is advisable to take the experience of the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), jointly administered by UN Habitat and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, as a model for creating governance structures for community radio stations. Community radio projects should seek to develop close relations with the NSP and similar community empowerment initiatives.

Technology

15. While FM offers short-term cost advantages and may be an appropriate solution, depending on topography and on the physical distribution of the community to be served, it would be a mistake to automatically choose it without first doing basic engineering studies and carefully evaluating the costs and benefits of each technology.
16. Community radio stations can make use of the Internet for networking with other stations and they can become community multimedia centres, incorporating Internet content in their programmes and providing communities with access and expertise. As new technologies and combinations of technologies make affordable rural Internet possible, connecting community radio stations should be a priority.

Coordination

17. A forum bringing together media development organisations, representatives from development agencies and ministries, and community radio practitioners could help to strengthen the links between development efforts and community radio. It would support exchange of information, coordination of activities, policy monitoring, evaluation and stimulation of community-based media. A seminar or seminar series on community media and development would offer a starting point for the creation of such a forum.
18. Attention must be paid to the development of indigenous leadership capacity in the community radio sector. This may lead to the establishment of an Afghan association of radio stations, producers and projects to: promote and develop new community media; facilitate exchanges of programmes, experience and personnel; coordinate lobbying; and encourage networking, international partnerships, capacity building and sharing of knowledge and resources.

VII. Appendices

1. Persons interviewed during the fact-finding mission
2. Details of active organizations interviewed
3. Radio stations in Afghanistan

1. Persons interviewed during the fact-finding mission

Note: those marked with an * were also present at the October 17th meeting in Kabul, where preliminary findings of the mission were presented and discussed)

- Deborah Alexander, USAID, Office of Transition Initiatives
- Manuel de Almeida e Silva, Director of Communication, UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)
- Yvette Bivigou, Communication Consultant, UNICEF*
- Rodolphe Baudeau, AINA*
- Etienne Careme, Information Officer, FAO*
- Amaury Coste, Media Action International (MAI)*
- Eric Davin, Director, AINA*
- Mohamed Ekram Shinwari, Afghan Centre for the Promotion of Communication (ACPC)
- Dr. Mohamed Eshaq, Director-General, Radio-Television Afghanistan (RTA)
- Alan Geere, Trainer, Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR)
- Mohamed Wahid Gharwal, Head, Department of Radio and Television, Faculty of Journalism, University of Kabul*
- Tesfai Ghermazien, Programme Developer, FAO
- Martin Hadlow, Director, UNESCO Afghanistan Office
- Masood Hamidzada, Area Manager, Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR)
- Wali Hashimi, Program Manager, USAID
- Abdulnaser Hotakie, Afghan Wireless Communication Corporation (AWCC)
- Dr. Javeed, HealthNet International (Peshawar)
- Atia Jeewa, Consultant, Baltic Media Centre (BMC)*
- Prof. M. Kazem Ahang, Dean, Faculty of Journalism, University of Kabul
- Ibrahim Kawosh, Director of Programming, Radio Sada-I-Solh
- Lalith Lankatilleke, Housing Advisor, UN Habitat
- Marc Lepage, Regional Information Manager, UNDP (stationed at Ministry of Communication)
- Waseem Mahmood, Project Manager, Baltic Media Centre (BMC)
- Alexis Martin, Project Director, Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society (IMPACS)*
- Daphne Meijer, Dutch Journalist
- Abdul Hafeez Mubarez, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Information and Culture
- Partaw Naderi, Reporter, Dari Service, BBC
- Dr. Akmal Naveed, Managing Director, Association for Community Development (ACD), (Peshawar)
- Mirdad Panjshiri, Agronomist, Ministry of Agriculture
- Christian Quick, Technical Operations, Internews*
- Samantha Reynolds, Chief Technical Advisor, UN Habitat, National Solidarity Programme
- Harold Ryan, Press and Communication Officer, European Commission*
- Barry Salaam, Managing Editor, Good Morning Afghanistan*
- Shirazzudin Siddiqi, Director, Afghan Education Project, BBC
- Lieutenant Colonel Joseph C. Sykes, US Army Civil Affairs
- Dr. N.S. Tunwar, Chief Technical Officer, FAO
- Abdul Wali, Editor, Kabul Weekly

- Mr. Watanyar, Office Manager, HealthNet International (Jalalabad)
- Ms. Zakiya Zaki, General Manager, Radio Sada-I-Solh*

People who attended only the October 17 meeting

- Rinda Bosker, Baltic Media Centre
- Ali Erfani, Afghan Mass Media Reconstruction Centre (AMRC)
- Mir Aziz Fanoos, Faculty of Journalism, Kabul University
- Roshan, UN Habitat, National Solidarity Programme
- Zabiullah Haidari, Faculty of Journalism, Kabul University

2. Details of active organizations interviewed

Following is a list of some of the key organizations consulted in the course of this study as well as a brief presentation of their activities that support radio.

UN Agencies

UNESCO

- It is the coordinator of the Programme Secretariat for Sports, Media and Culture, a grouping in which Afghan government, international agencies and NGOs discuss and negotiate policy;
- It advises the Ministry of Information and Culture on media policy;
- It is active in the efforts to transform Radio Afghanistan into a true public service broadcaster;
- It was one of the funders of September's *International Seminar on Promoting Independent and Pluralistic Media in Afghanistan*;
- It provided support, including an Internet connection, for the AINA media centre;
- It supports the Faculty of Journalism. It has run a campaign to get books for documentation centre, has donated equipment and an Internet connection for a computer training centre for the faculty, and will be donating a radio studio and transmitter;
- It will be donating a transmitter and equipment to Radio Voice of Women in Kabul.

UNAMA - United Nation Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

The overall coordinating UN agency. The director of communication is facilitating and supporting efforts to develop Afghan media. They also have a variety of media monitoring and research activities.

UNDP

Trying to bring Internet access to Afghanistan, especially concerned about rural access. Possibly interested in mixed media concept – radio as a "gateway" to Internet.

UNICEF

Radio production and training on women and health (with Ministry of Education and WHO) at BBC's media centre in the RTA building. Distribution of radio equipment, including World Space satellite radio receivers.

FAO

Has provides some information support to BBC Afghan Education project. To date has few radio activities, but hopes to integrate radio in its farmer education activities.

UN Habitat

The National Solidarity Programme (NSP) has eighty community forums and plans to initiate an additional 800 in the next year to promote grass roots development projects and self-governance. NSP is run in partnership with Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and with funding from the World Bank. NSP has no current radio activities but is open to introducing community radio as a theme for consideration by the community forums.

Development organisations: Official and NGOs

AINA Afghan Media Project

Runs the Afghan Media and Culture Centre. Primarily concerned with print media but also has a basic radio studio in use by Radio Sada-I-Solh. A digital editing suite will be added by Internews.
<http://www.ainaworld.com/>

IMPACS, Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society

Mandated to work on media and peace building with a focus on women. Aims to set up community radio stations, providing equipment and management assistance. Are engaged with Radio Sada-I-Solh (writing business plan, fundraising, holding weekly meetings). In Bamiyan IMPACS is considering a role searching for and training community stakeholders to operate the equipment that was donated by the US army.
<http://www.impacs.org/>

Media Action International

Aims to promote a more effective use of the media to help local populations in crises. It provides basic journalistic training and is developing a project for campus radio in various cities.
<http://www.mediaaction.org/>

Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR)

Primarily works with working print journalists, providing hands-on training for working print journalists. Publishes articles, including some about Afghan media, as Afghan recovery Reports at: http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?afghan_index.html

Baltic Media Centre (BMC)

Produces daily 2 hours on Radio Kabul: *Good Morning Afghanistan* and *Good Evening Afghanistan*. Plan to extend reach to other cities, first by rebroadcasting the programme on Radio Afghanistan stations and later by producing local versions. Could provide training and support to community radio stations.
<http://www.bmc.dk/>

BBC's Afghan Education Project

Has been producing programmes for eight years, such as the educational soap *New Home, New Life*, and *Radio Education For Afghan Children - REACH*. Does intensive research on community level, has a large network of journalists and researchers, and has experience with participatory programme production .
http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/people/highlights/010711_reach.shtml

BBC World Service Trust

Provided equipment to Radio/TV Afghanistan for two radio studios
Training more than 150 journalists and technical staff in Kabul and the regions.
Working in partnership with the Afghan Interim Authority to assess future needs.
Providing resources for the co-ordination of media projects.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/us/trust/index.shtml>

Internews

Technical training, equipment and assistance to Radio Afghanistan stations around the country and training of journalists and station managers. Working to transform regional Radio Afghanistan stations into independent public radio stations. Plans to begin production of weekly programme for rebroadcast on Radio Afghanistan affiliated stations. Internews also manages the Open Media Fund for Afghanistan, that provides grants to journalists and media projects.
<http://www.internews.org/>

ACBAR, Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief

Facilitates services and representation for seventy national and international relief NGO's, including the ARIC documentation centre.
<http://www.acbar.org>

European Commission

Coordination of EU humanitarian assistance, reconstruction and development to Afghanistan. EC is cooperating with the National Solidarity Programme on a project to establish cultural centres, which could offer synergies with community radio.
http://europa.eu.int/comm/index_en.htm

USAID

Aims to rebuild communications and journalistic capacity to help produce a peaceful, stable, and viable political transition and administration. USAID has provided Radio Afghanistan with some equipment. Transfer of transmitters in several cities. Currently trying to identify solutions to the Bamiyan problem. Most of their radio support is done through Internews.

<http://www.usaid.gov/afghanistan/media.html>

Government of Afghanistan

Ministry of Information and Culture

Is politically in charge of formulating media policy, broadcast licensing and creating independent broadcasting authority.

Ministry of Communication

Responsible for technical aspects of broadcasting such as frequency coordination and satellite use. Also for licensing telecommunications services, including basic telephone services, GSM and Internet.

Ministry of Agriculture

In cooperation with FAO hopes to integrate radio in its farmer education activities.

Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation and Development

Partner with UN Habitat in the National Solidarity Programme (NSP).

Afghan non-governmental organizations

ACPC, Afghan Centre for the Promotion of Communication

A group of Afghan working journalists trying to create a press club in Kabul as a meeting place and support structure for independent journalism.

Radio & Television Department, Faculty of Journalism, Kabul University

Is expecting an FM transmitter and studio to be donated by UNESCO. Plans are to use the station primarily for training students and secondarily as a "Campus Plus" radio station, for youth, students and residents of the area surrounding the university. Available facilities include a computer centre with eight Internet-connected computers and a resource centre.

Radio Sada-I-Sohl

Located in Jabal Saraj. The only independent radio station in Afghanistan. An example of a radio project that contributes a significant part of its efforts to exploring the development potential of radio.

3. Radio stations in Afghanistan

City	Station	# of staff	Transmitter	Coverage range/population	Broadcast hours
Farah	Radio Farah	20	25kW MW	400km, 200.000	7.30-8.30
Gardez	Radio Gardez	19	7kW MW	200 km, 4 million	7-9, 18-19
Ghazni	Radio Ghazni	23	500W MW	40km, 100.000	7-9,18.30-21
Heart	Radio Herat	36	1000W MW	10km, 600.000	6-9.30, 17.30-19.30
Helmand	Radio Helmand	19	5kW MW	20km, 300.000	10-11, 17-19.45,
Jabal Saraj (independent)	Radio Sada-l-Solh	8	10kW MW	120km	not active
Jalalabad	Radio Nangarhar	39	400W MW	30km, 1million	7-9, 17-19
Kabul	Radio Kabul	1300 ¹²	10kW, 50kW MW	2,5 million	
Kandahar	Radio Kandahar	41	10kW MW	100km, 1,5 million	6-8, 17-20
Khost	Radio Khost	20	7* or 50 kW* MW	220km, 750.000	11-14, 17-20
Kunduz	Radio Kunduz	23	5kW MW	500.000	Not active
Mazar-l-Sharif	Radio Balkh	46	2kW MW	1,5 million	7-9, 17-20
Nimroz	Radio Nimroz	26	10kW MW	25km, 100.000	17-19.30
Asadabad	Radio Kunar	25	100W MW	10-15km 100.000	15-17
Maimana City	Radio Faryab	24	500W* or 5kW** MW	30km, 800.000	17-19
Mahterkim*	Radio Laghman				
Samangan*	Radio Samangan	16	100W FM	15km, 60.000	15-16,30
Bamiyan* (independent)	Radio Bamiyan		400W MW		18-19.30

Compiled from data collected by Internews and Radio-Television Afghanistan (RTA). When sources had different data, it is attributed as *Internews or **RTA. RTV Afghanistan also mentions Ghurat (7kW), Guzmi, Paktika, Badghise, Sarepul and Kunarhar (all 100 W) as having transmitters, but no further details were available.

¹² Includes all Radio-Television Afghanistan staff based in Kabul.