



Afghan Media in 2010

Priority District Report Lashkar Gah (Helmand)

October 13, 2010

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1 Introduction

1.1 District profile

Lashkar Gah district is located in the east of Helmand province and covers an area of 984km². It borders Nahri Sarraj district to the north, Maywand district (Kandahar) to the east, Garmser district to the south, Nawa to the west, and Nad Ali district to the northwest. The district is home to the city of Lashkar Gah, which is the provincial center. Lashkar Gah district is flat and the city is built around the Helmand River.

Figure 1: Map of Lashkar Gah district



The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development estimates the district population at 201,500. The majority of the population is Pashtun, and Pashto is the primary language, spoken by approximately 70%. In the district center, the provincial government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector are major employers; however, in peri-urban and rural areas, agriculture represents the main source of income. Lashkar Gah sits in a major agricultural zone of Helmand province. In the 1960s, the US government engaged in a major irrigation, water management, and housing development project along the Helmand River, which earned the district the nickname “Little America.” Much of the infrastructure has been damaged, but crops including melon, watermelon, cotton, and wheat are still produced in large quantities. Poppy makes up approximately 10% of the district’s economy, although a recent disease, apparently damaging 80% of the crop, may well have reduced this figure in 2010.

Lashkar Gah lies close to the Afghanistan ring road, and as such is only two hours away from Kandahar. The provincial airport has recently been rebuilt using foreign aid, and two airlines

serve the city from Kabul. The district has a reasonable electricity supply, but there is insufficient capacity to provide full coverage across all areas of the district simultaneously. Several large dams in the province (e.g. Kajaki and Grishk) contribute to the supply.

Compared with other districts in Helmand province, where mobile phone coverage is very poor or nonexistent (i.e. most of Garmser, Nad Ali, Kajaki, Musa Qala, Sangin, Nawzad, Washer, and Baghran), Lashkar Gah district has good coverage from all major operators (AWCC, Roshan, MTN, Etisalat, and Afghan Telecom).

Major NGOs involved in development work in Lashkar Gah include the following: the Afghan Development Association (ADA), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), International Relief and Development (IRD), Agricultural Cooperative Development International/Volunteers in Overseas Cooperative Assistance (ACDI/VOCA), and the Community Development Agriculture Program (CDA). The National Solidarity Program (NSP) is implemented by Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC, formerly the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee). Respondents were generally pleased with the reconstruction work that has taken place over the past year. Major achievements have included a park in Lashkar Gah city, paved roads, and water and sanitation systems.

With a major international presence in Lashkar Gah, there is reasonable security in the district center and even in the more remote areas of the district.

1.2 Methodology

Fieldwork was conducted in April and May 2010 and covered the following areas of the district: Lashkar Gah city, Kart-e-Lagan (peri-urban area, 3km east of Lashkar Gah city), Mukhtar (3km west of Lashkar Gah), Talibano Numrii (4-5km northeast of Lashkar Gah), and Shaheed Ghaltan (Walikaram Hadira) (2km north of Lashkar Gah). Phone interviews were also conducted, with no precise geographic targeting.

No major security issue was reported in the course of the fieldwork, with the exception of insurgents causing injury to a community leader in April 2010.

Key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with: five journalists (Ariana TV, Bost radio, Rana Rohe News Agency, Negaah TV, and Azadi radio); eight community leaders (including a manager of a carpentry factory, a former manager of the Directorate of Energy and Water for Helmand province, a human rights office employee, the director of Bos Factory (cooking oil), the financial manager of Helmand province, the dean of Lashkar Gah boys' high school, and the manager of Arzaq (from the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock)); and three outlet managers (phone interviews with Baghrey magazine, Sabawoon radio/Muska radio/Baghrey magazine, and Bost radio).

Another 185 interviews were also conducted and audience data were collected from 61 individuals living in Helmand province by means of a phone survey, which took place from July 9 to 23 and from August 22 to 28, 2010.

2 Media landscape

The district's media landscape is relatively vibrant, with one local TV channel, six local radio stations (including five privately owned), and over ten local/provincial publications. The city has over 200 video shops, 50 public gathering spaces (such as *chaikhana* (tea houses) and ice cream shops) showing TV and videos, 30 Public Call Offices (PCOs), 10 internet cafés, and 10 computer shops. One journalists' association and one media NGO are also present in the city and contribute to the liveliness of the media community.

2.1 Media outlets

Lashkar Gah district has access to six terrestrial TV channels, one of which is local, and ten radio stations, six of which are local. Approximately 12 local and provincial newspapers and magazines are distributed in the district.

2.1.1 Television

Besides satellite and cable channels, there are six TV channels available in the district through a terrestrial signal.

Name	Scope	Ownership	Antenna loc.	Broadcast radius
Helmand RTA	Local	Governmental	Lashkar Gah	45 km
Tolo	National	Private	Lashkar Gah	50km
Lemar	National	Private	Lashkar Gah	50km
Ariana	National	Private	Lashkar Gah	35-75km
Shamshad	National	Private	Lashkar Gah	30-160km
Saba	National	Private	Kandahar	30km

Helmand RTA

Helmand Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) was established in 2003 after the collapse of the Taliban. It broadcasts through a 33m antenna with a 1,000W transmitter and has a 45km broadcast radius. The estimated population reached is 500,000 people. Programming runs for three hours a day, with 33% locally produced – the rest comes from Kabul RTA. A total of 70% of programs are in Pashto and 30% in Dari. The current director is Mr. Ahmad Nawid Nazari.

National channels

Additionally, national TV channels Tolo, Lemar, Ariana, Shamshad, and Saba are broadcast in Lashkar Gah.

Cable networks

One cable network, Azizi, provides 45-50 channels to approximately 5,000 subscribers. This includes Afghan channels (e.g. RTA, Shamshad, Ariana, Lemar, Saba, Noorin, and Tolo); two channels produced by the network (movies and other content on CDs); three Pakistani (Khyber, Bolan, and Joe); and a large number of Indian and other international channels.

Karokhi TV Cable network used to operate in Lashkar Gah but stopped activities in 2009.

2.1.2 Radio

Besides the shortwave radio stations that are available throughout Afghanistan, there are 10 radio stations available in the district, 6 of which are local. All local radio stations rely on commercial advertising, and programs generally run from 6-7am to 12pm.

Name	Scope	Ownership	Frequency	Antenna location	Broadcast radius
Helmand RTA	Local	Government	95.5 FM	Lashkar Gah	45km
Muska	Local	Private	93.2 FM	Lashkar Gah	120km
Bost	Local	Private	89.8 FM	Lashkar Gah	70km
Sabawoon	Local	Private	88 FM	Lashkar Gah	35km
Samoon	Local	Private	88.6 FM	Lashkar Gah	25km
Killid (Kandahar)	Local	Private	89.4 FM	Kandahar	100km
Arman FM	National	Private	98.1 FM	Lashkar Gah	40km
BBC	National	Public (UK)	89.2 FM	Lashkar Gah	20-25km
Azadi	National	Private	100.5 FM	Kandahar	25km
Ashna/VOA	National	Public (US)	100.5 FM	Kandahar	25km

Helmand RTA

Helmand RTA is a state-run radio station that was established in 1991. It uses a 45m antenna with a power of 1,000W and has a broadcast radius of 45-50km. An estimated 500,000 people are reached. The radio broadcasts eight hours a day, 10% of which is locally produced content, with the rest coming from Kabul RTA. A total of 75% of programming is in Pashto and the remaining 25% is in Dari.

Muska

Muska was established in 2008. It has an antenna of 43m, a 1kW transmitter, and a broadcast radius of 120km. Roughly 1.8 million people are reached by this radio station, which broadcasts 10 hours per day, 70% in Pashto and 30% in Dari. It is managed by Mr. Mirwais Patsoon (who also owns Baghrey magazine and Sabawoon radio).

Bost

Bost is an independent radio station that started in 2008. Its antenna is located in the center of the city, close to Haji Ghulam Nabi Market, on the roof of a five-storey building. The height of the aerial antenna is 42m, and it has a 600W transmitter and a broadcasting radius of 70km. It covers all surrounding districts, including Marja, Grishk, Nawa, Nad Ali, Nawzad, Washer, Maywand, and Dil Araam. According to owner Mr. Abdul Salam Zahid, 90% of Helmand province is covered.

With no other private radio station in Farah province (northwest of Lashkar Gah), the government has reportedly committed to supporting Bost by providing a new antenna, which would also allow for increased coverage.

Bost broadcasts irregularly, to a total of 13 hours a day, with a plan to expand broadcasting to 24 hours. Its programming is focused on education and religion, which makes it popular. Music is broadcast for 21 hours a week, and content is created for approximately 7 hours a week (mainly youth, sports, and social issues). About 7 hours of content is received for free.

There are a number of live programs on Bost radio, including *Sahar Monikmargha* (“Good Morning”) and *Marghalare* (“Jewelry”), largely based on jokes and poem requests. Interactive programming is also offered, through *Soch*, on which key actors are invited to discuss different topics. Interviewees highlighted the importance of increasing religious and educational content across the programming.

When the radio station started, it was exclusively Pashto and relied on five staff members, one generator, and a small loan. The station now has some Dari programming as well (currently around 20% of the total) and employs 13 part-time journalists, 10 part-time non-journalists on a voluntary basis, 3 technical staff, and 1 guard/cook. There is one female employee. A major issue from the management point of view relates to the limited training opportunities available in journalism, technical issues, and marketing.

Operation costs include the following: salaries for the few staff members not working on a voluntary basis (\$500 a month, which would rise to \$2,000 if all staff were remunerated), electricity (\$100 a month), rent (\$120 a month), and other expenses (\$100 a month).

The radio is self-funded. Advertising is broadcast for approximately 7.5 hours a week and generates a total of \$1,000 a month. Prices are as follows: \$2-3 a minute for local shopkeepers, \$5-6 a minute for national companies, and \$5-15 a minute for government and international companies. Major advertising clients include Roshan, local companies (e.g. transportation, construction), and Azizi Bank. Bost also has paid programming, with Nai radio (a Kabul-based station) broadcasting its content on Bost.

In the past, local people complained about *Degharme Naghme* (“Lunchtime Music”), a program broadcasting songs by Kandahar singer Sahapirei Naghma, in relation to an excessive focus on her as well as a lack of sensitivity to Afghan culture. These complaints, plus pressure from insurgents, forced the radio station to interrupt this programming and to replace it with the religious *Sahar Monikmargha* (“Good Morning”).

TV was mentioned as a potential obstacle to radio listenership. Bost radio suffers from limited resources and is in need of computers, microphones, mixers, internet access, a room for technical equipment, and training facilities.

Bost has also established a production company called Azanga Production.

Sabawoon

Sabawoon is a private radio station established in 2004. It is owned by Mr. Mirwais Patsoon and managed by Baryalai Hilmand. Electricity is a major constraint to broadcasting, and the station relies on generators 50% of the time. It uses a 42m 600W antenna which has a 35km broadcast radius. Approximately 880,000 people are reached. The station broadcasts 18 hours a day, 3 hours of which are Salam Watandar content. The broadcast languages are Pashto (80%) and Dari (20%), in a total of 25 different programs. Music is broadcast for 14-21 hours a week. Local content generally takes up 28 hours a week. Advertising, such as death announcements and public service announcement, is broadcast for seven hours a week. The station does not purchase content. Interactive programs are broadcast, and more are in the pipeline. Live programming exists in the form of political debates, literature readings, and call-in shows for song requests. Phone calls and letters are the main forms of

listener interaction. Respondents suggested that that religion, education, and health are topics that listeners want more of.

The radio station employs five full-time journalists and ten part-time journalists. All journalists have graduated from university. In addition, there are four non-journalists, two marketing staff, two technical staff, and four guards. The station employs three female staff.

Sabawoon does not have external funding. The price of advertising ranges from \$5-15 a minute, generating an income of \$2,000 a month. Major clients are private companies, mainly banks, mobile companies, and construction companies. Monthly operation costs include salaries (\$1,500), electricity/fuel for generators (\$300), and rent (\$300).

The plan for the near future is to increase the hours of programming and launch a TV channel.

Samoon

Samoon started in 2006. It has a 25m high antenna and a 150W transmitter broadcasting over a radius of 25km. Programming runs for 13 hours a day, mainly in Pashto (60%), with the rest in Dari. Roughly 85% of programming is locally created.

National radio stations

Additionally, and apart from shortwave stations available throughout the country, the following national radio stations are received: RTA, the BBC, Azadi, and Voice of America (VOA)/Ashna.

All national radio stations have good reception in Lashkar Gah district, with the exception of Killid (owing to the distance from the Killid antenna, which is based in Kandahar).

2.1.3 Newspapers

The Nye Express newspaper distribution network has a representative in Lashkar Gah (Mr. Ajmal Safi). The network distributes a number of daily newspapers coming from Kabul, magazines from Kabul and Jalalabad, and local magazines (Baghrey, Safaar). There are reportedly eight local publications in Lashkar Gah and six provincial/regional publications.

Name	Type	Rhythm	Scope	Ownership	Circulation	Price
Helmand News	Newspaper	Weekly	Local	Government	300-400	Free
Bost	Newspaper	Monthly	Local	Private	500	Free
Safaar	Newspaper	Quarterly	Local	Private	1,000	\$1
Sistan	Newspaper	Weekly	Local	Private		
Baghrey	Magazine	Monthly	Local	Private	700	\$1
Lashkar Gah	Magazine	Quarterly	Local	Private	600-800	Free
Poya	Magazine	Monthly	Local	Private	1,000	\$0.5
Nan Afghanistan	Magazine	Bimonthly	Local	Private	3,000	\$0.3
Eela	Magazine	Monthly	Provincial	Private	1,000	\$0.2
Zuwanan	Magazine	Monthly	Provincial	Private		Free
Helah	Magazine	Monthly	Provincial	Private	2,000	\$0.4
Shamla	Magazine	Quarterly	Provincial	Private		\$0.6
Islami Diwa	Magazine	Monthly	Regional	Government	2,000	Free
Tolo-e-Afghan	Newspaper	Daily	Regional	Private	1,000	Free
Afghanistan	Newspaper	Daily	National	Private	-	-
Khadmatgar	Newspaper	Daily	National	Private	-	-
Milli Mashorikat	Newspaper	Daily	National	Private	-	-
Milli Islahat	Newspaper	Daily	National	Private	-	-
Kabul Times	Newspaper	Daily	National	Private	-	-
Killid	Magazine	Weekly	National	Private	25,000	-
Mursal	Magazine	Weekly	National	Private	15,000	-
Roz	Magazine	Monthly	National	Private	-	-
Sada-e-Azadi	Newspaper	Biweekly	National	Military	423,000	Free

Helmand News

Helmand News is a weekly government newspaper printed in 300-400 copies and distributed for free in government offices, NGOs, schools, and the bazaar.

Bost

Bost is a monthly publication established in 2007 by a group of five people working on a voluntary basis and under the lead of Mr. Ahmad Shah Patsoon (editor in chief and manager). It prints 500 copies a month and is distributed for free through an informal network of acquaintances within Helmand province (Nad Ali and Garmser districts) and also Kandahar and Khost provinces. Thanks to the quality of its content, Bost received funding in 2008 from the Ministry of Information and Culture (MoIC) to cover one year's costs.

Safaar

Safaar is a quarterly publication owned by the Helmand Cultural Movement and managed by Mr. Darwish Khawndi. The editor in chief is Shah Mohammad Darwish. It was established in 2007 and prints 1,000 copies at a unit price of \$1. Roughly 15 people work for the magazine. An informal network of friends and colleagues distribute the publication, which reaches all provinces and eight districts in Helmand, including Nad Ali and Garmser.

Sistan

Sistan is a weekly publication managed by Mr. Abdul Wodood Hiijran. Local sources, including Bost's manager, reported that it is not active anymore.

Baghrey

Baghrey is an independent monthly Pashto magazine established in late 2009 by Mr. Abdul Samad Rohani. Since his death (reportedly caused by insurgents), his brother Mr. Mirwais Patsoon has been running it, along with Mr. Sharifullah Dost and Mr. Shariat Tiar. It has so far been issued only a couple of times, with an average circulation of 500-700 copies (15-20 pages per issue) and sold at \$0.60 per issue.

Staff at Baghrey include the following full-time members: two journalists, six non-journalists, one marketing officer, and seven other staff members. No females are employed at the magazine.

Running expenditures include salaries (\$2,000 a month) and electricity (\$30 a month). Printing costs amount to \$0.40-0.50 per issue.

The magazine has no external sources of funding. The price of advertising is \$10-20 a page and \$40 a page for color, generating a total of \$40-80 a month. Commercial advertising is generally placed by local companies. Annual subscriptions range from \$120 in Afghanistan to \$140 abroad. Financial resources are very limited and the outlet lacks computers, a generator, and training and refresher courses on reconstruction activities in the area (e.g. Afghan National Police (ANP) programs).

Lashkar Gah

Lashkar Gah is a quarterly magazine which started in 2009. It has recently published its seventh issue. It belongs to the Bust Cultural Association, a voluntary-based organization with 60 members, run by editor in chief Abdul Hadi Omari and owned by Mr. Mirwais Patsoon. Distribution is free and extends to neighboring provinces.

Poya

Poya is a Dari monthly magazine printed in Lashkar Gah (1,000 copies a month) and sold at a unit price of \$0.50. It is owned by Mr. Mohammad Qasem (former employee of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR)). It is popular mostly among the Hazara population.

Nan Afghanistan

Nan Afghanistan is a bimonthly magazine established in 2009. It belongs to the Nan Afghanistan Association and is owned by Mr. Habib Shah Taroon. It publishes 3,000 copies at a unit price of \$0.35. Funds for printing generally come from members of the association, so advertising will make it more financially sustainable in the near future. Distribution is managed by Nye and takes place across almost 30 provinces.

Eela

Eela is a Pashto publication established in 2010. It prints 1,000 copies a month distributed in Helmand's districts at a unit price of \$0.20. It is owned by a branch of the Abohashim Sarlani Literary, Cultural, and Social Association located in Garmser district (Helmand), and the editor in chief is Mr. Sardar Mohammad Hamdard (also director of the association). Staff members include eight volunteers, who are also working for Shamlā magazine.

Zuwanan

Zuwanan is a monthly magazine established in 2009 and distributed for free in Helmand province. It belongs to the Directorate of Youth under MoIC, is run by editor in chief Mehrabuddin Pajhwok, and is funded by the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF). Two people work for this publication.

Helah

Helah is a monthly Pashto magazine established in 2009. It is owned by the Afghan Good Youth National Association (with student members from Helmand, Kandahar, Zabul, Nimroz, and Kabul) and Sifatullah Zahidi is the editor in chief. It prints 2,000 copies. Approximately 12 people work for the magazine, which is distributed free through the association’s network. Financial constraints have hampered its publication in recent months. The magazine experienced pressure from the authorities following a report on corruption in Helmand province.¹

Shamla

Shamla is a quarterly magazine in Pashto which was established in Pakistan in 2004 under the auspices of the Afghan Refugee Literary and Cultural Association. It moved to Afghanistan in 2009 and Mr. Sardar Mohammad Hamdard (director of Abohashim Sarlani Literary, Cultural, and Social Association) became editor in chief. The magazine employs eight people. The printing budget comes from the members of the association. Distribution takes place in most southern provinces and also in Pakistan, and the unit selling price is about \$0.65. Some Dari reporting will be included in the future.

Islami Diwa

Islami Diwa is a state monthly magazine established in 2002 and printed in Kandahar. It is managed by Mr. Mawlawi Hekmatullah Hekmat. It prints 2,000 copies a month and is free. It is distributed in all provinces of the country (roughly 10 copies are distributed to government authorities in each province) by mail or through informal networks.

Tolo-e-Afghan

Tolo-e-Afghan was the first daily newspaper established in Kandahar. It is a state newspaper which started in 1921 as an irregular two-page publication. In 2008, it became a regular daily newspaper (published daily). It is currently managed by Mr. Abdul Qudus Baes, who has been employed at the magazine since 2001. The newspaper prints 1,000 copies a day and distribution is free. It is a four-page newspaper written in Pashto (80%) and Dari (20%). The plan is to expand this to eight pages and include more educational topics and health. Distribution takes place in Uruzgan, Zabul, and Helmand provinces and all districts in Kandahar through informal networks. Please see the Kandahar report for further details.

¹ An online weblog of the magazine can be found at: www.hellah.blogfa.com.

2.2 New media

2.2.1 Mobile media

Nearly all households interviewed in the district have someone who owns a mobile phone, and youth occasionally share pictures and entertainment clips with each other. Mobile phones are not really used as a source of information in the district, however.

2.2.2 Internet

Internet is generally used by NGOs, local firms and government offices through satellite and mobile operators AWCC, Roshan, Etisalat, and MTN. Provincial and district government offices are connected to the Government Communication Network (GCN). Public internet access is provided by approximately 10 internet cafés, but the connection is very poor.

2.3 Media and information actors

2.3.1 Government

The local population in Lashkar Gah has access to a number of state-run outlets, including Helmand RTA, Kabul RTA, and Helmand News.

There is a representative of MoIC, Mr. Ali Shah Khan Mazlumyar, and a Bakhtar News Agency (BNA) representative, Dr. Naqibullah. There is one public library in the city.

2.3.2 Outlet managers and journalists

A journalists' association was established by the government in 2009 and currently counts approximately 35 journalists among its members. It is based in the Press Office for Culture and Information in Lashkar Gah city and gives journalists the opportunity to liaise regularly.

Lashkar Gah has seen a significant increase in the number of journalists in the past five years, according to IWPR (see below). Journalists in Lashkar Gah work mainly for Azadi, the BBC, Helmand RTA, and Sada-e-Azadi. They encounter considerable security constraints when travelling around the district. They generally follow up on news across the district via phone, and on rare occasions leave the center and go to different areas to report on an *ad hoc* basis. Travel might take place when the Helmand provincial governor arranges trips around the province and when events require direct news coverage. Restricted movement owing to insecurity clearly represents the main barrier to journalism quality.

Besides a general feeling of insecurity among journalists (caused not only by insurgent pressure but also by the government), limited accountability is also a major concern in Lashkar Gah. BBC journalist Abdul Samad Rohani was killed in 2008, but no one took responsibility or followed up on this event.

Community leaders interviewed noted that it is not really possible for local journalists to comment on casualty numbers after a military operation.

2.3.3 Other content providers

As mentioned earlier, Sabawoon radio broadcasts Salam Watandar content. It is seemingly the only station doing so in the district. Bost radio receives content from Nai radio. No local content provider was identified besides the media outlets described above.

2.3.4 Media NGOs

There is only one media NGO in Lashkar Gah: IWPR. Mr. Ahmad Shah Patsoon has managed its media center since 2007, with the assistance of one journalist. Major activities include training (e.g. computer skills, internet use), with the overall aim of increasing the capacities of local journalists and offering a platform for communication and coordination in the area. Mr. Patsoon mentioned that the office is currently based within the government printing press office: it is likely that it will have to move to other premises soon.

Media outlets also occasionally conduct training for journalists in-house.

2.3.5 Traditional information sources

Traditional sources of information in Lashkar Gah include community leaders, such as *mullahs/wakil* in small areas of the city and surrounding villages; *maliks* (village chiefs); the provincial governor; the district governor; heads of families; and tribal elders. Especially when representing the district to the donor community, *maliks* are often criticized for taking decisions unilaterally, thus the *shuras* (councils) and the *mullahs* are generally preferred.

These leaders are considered trustworthy sources of information in relation to religion and local news (including news on aid or development issues).

2.3.6 Insurgents

Insurgents approach journalists both physically and by mobile phone. *Shabnama* (“night letters”) are occasionally used. There are rumors that insurgents run a radio station in the district, called Amarat, although the fieldwork could not confirm this. This is said to be a mobile radio station, heard in Grishk, Nad Ali, and, more recently, Musa Qala. It is common for insurgents to intimidate the population by collecting *zaqat*, a 10% tax on the yearly income of land tenants.

The number of casualties in fighting with insurgents is generally a controversial issue, one which exposes journalists to complaints from both sides.

2.3.7 Military

No local military station is based directly in Lashkar Gah, but Tamadon radio, broadcasting from the Nad Ali district Forward Operating Base (FOB), can be received. This station broadcasts 16 hours a day (8am-12pm) and includes music (90% of total programming), local news (every day at 8pm), a 4-hour interactive program (*Delikunu Zuab*) during which listeners request songs and hear answers to letters, district officials’ speeches, and some local reporting (e.g. interviews in schools).

3 Audience

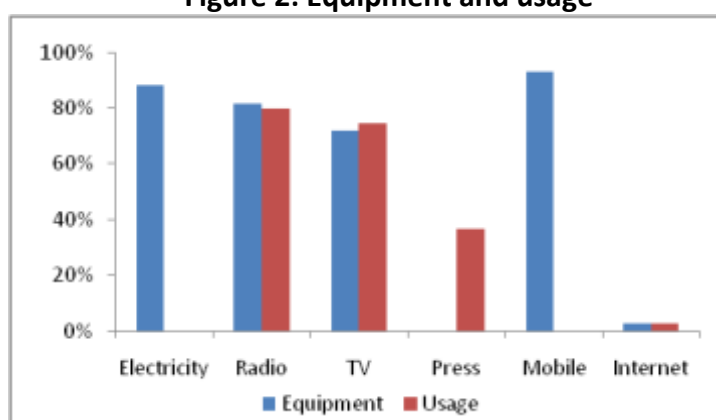
The following is a description of the audience in Lashkar Gah district, based on 185 interviews. Audience data collection was also carried out by means of 435 phone interviews with 61 unique media users in Helmand province.

3.1 Equipment and usage

3.1.1 Household equipment

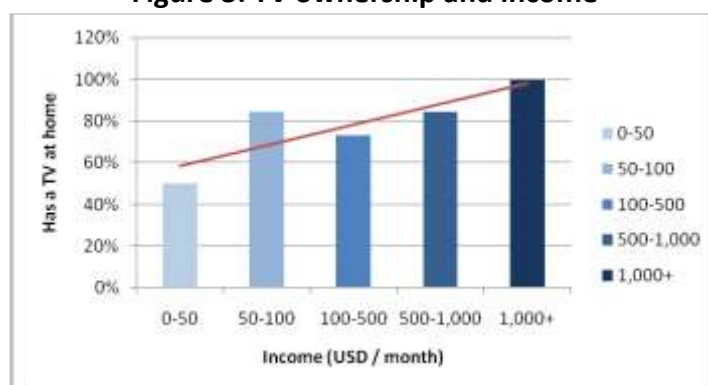
Households interviewed in Lashkar Gah are well equipped in terms of radios (82%), TV sets (72%), and mobile phones (93%). There is clearly no financial or cultural barrier to accessing the radio. A basic battery and a crank radio at the bazaar cost \$0.40 and \$8, respectively.

Figure 2: Equipment and usage



The TV equipment rate is explained in part by relatively widespread access to electricity (in large parts of Lashkar Gah city and some surrounding villages). In our sample, 89% of respondents had access to electricity (80% through the grid and 9% through generators or solar panels; in the most rural location visited in the district, 45% had access to electricity). It can also be explained by the broad range of media outlets, related to demand, and the importance of Lashkar Gah in terms of population.

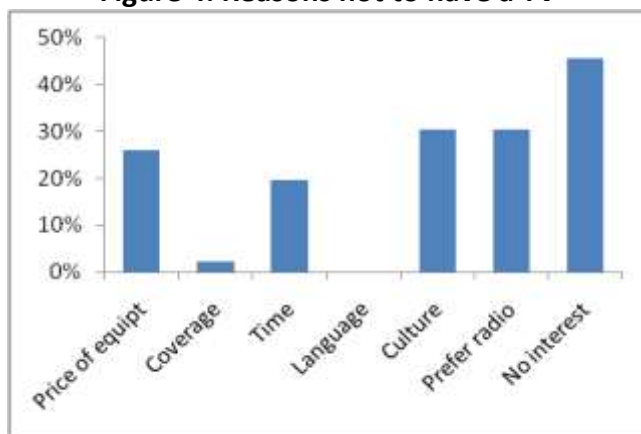
Figure 3: TV ownership and income



One reason given for not having a TV was the price of the equipment (26%). Although there is a visible positive correlation between income and TV ownership, it should be noted that 50% of very low-income households and 85% of low-income households sampled own a TV. As such, as is often the case, the major barrier to owning a TV set is not necessarily the price

of the set (a new, entry-level TV set can be found for about \$100 in Lashkar Gah bazaar), but rather the need for equipment to generate electricity when the household is not connected to the grid. The other major reason was lack of interest. A total of 30% of respondents cited culture as a reason not to have a TV.

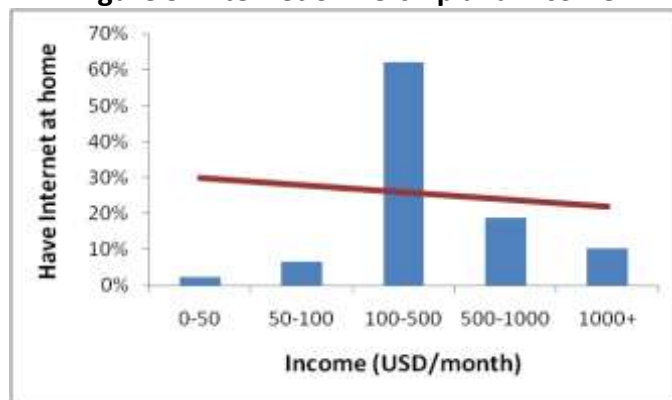
Figure 4: Reasons not to have a TV



As in many large cities, Lashkar Gah seems saturated in terms of mobile penetration (93%).

Domestic internet equipment is correlated more strongly than TV with income level. Of the lowest-income households sampled, 2% own internet equipment, compared with over 20% of the highest-income households.

Figure 5: Internet ownership and income



3.1.2 Sources of information and media usage

For nearly all topics, interviewees declared that they liked the media (both radio and TV) as a source of information, with the only topic on the list standing out for use of traditional sources of information being religion (64% consult the *mullah* at the local mosque).

Tribal arguments requiring third-party moderation, land disputes, voluntary activities (such as cleaning areas of the city), and brainstorming on problems to be addressed in proposals to NGOs also use sources of information other than official media. The value of traditional sources of information lies in their relatively higher level of involvement in conflict resolution (e.g. through personal engagement).

As in other districts, Lashkar Gah respondents are overwhelmingly radio users (80%), although the district also has a very large base of TV users (74%) and newspaper/magazine readers (36%). Internet penetration is very low, and only an estimated 3% of the total population of the district knows how to use it.

Most respondents reported listening to the radio several times a week or every day (72%). The majority (70%) said they watched TV in the same way. Reading newspapers/magazines is even more frequent: 50% declared that they read the press sometimes, 40% often. Interviewees in Lashkar Gah can be described as relatively avid media users.

3.1.3 Usage patterns

Radio and TV are used mostly in the evening, with 5-7pm the peak of radio listenership, with many going on to listen at 7-11pm too. Most users listen with attention at these times.

Highest TV viewership occurs at 7-11pm, when almost 90% of respondents watch TV with attention. Access to electricity explains this to a large extent, as does the fact that this is the time of day when families tend to gather and spend time together. Radio listenership experiences fewer sharp increases, since no electricity is needed.

Figure 6: Preferred times to listen to radio

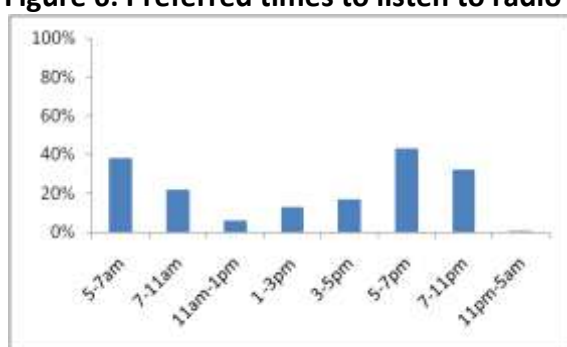
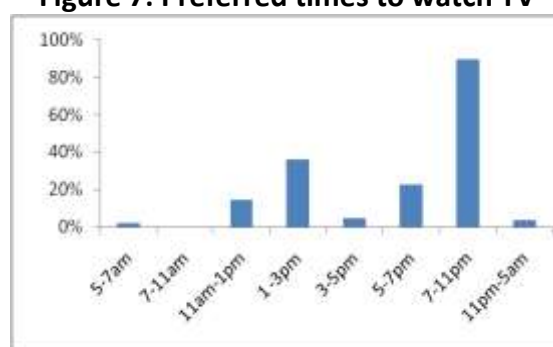


Figure 7: Preferred times to watch TV



3.2 Preferences

3.2.1 Outlets

Radio

Preferred radio stations are local ones: Sabawoon (mentioned by 47% of listeners), Helmand RTA (39%), Samoon (33%) and Bost (25%). The only national stations on the list are the BBC and Arman FM, which were among the preferred for approximately 20% of interviewees, respectively. Tamadon, the local military radio station, was also mentioned.

These results are relatively consistent with what was observed during the audience survey, although Tamadon was more listened to in Helmand province than it was remembered or mentioned in Lashkar Gah.

Note that, when asked specifically which *local* radio stations were listened to the most, interviewees ranked them differently, with Helmand Radio mentioned by 36%, then Bost (23%), followed by Sabawoon (21%).

Figure 8: Preferred radio stations (3 choices)

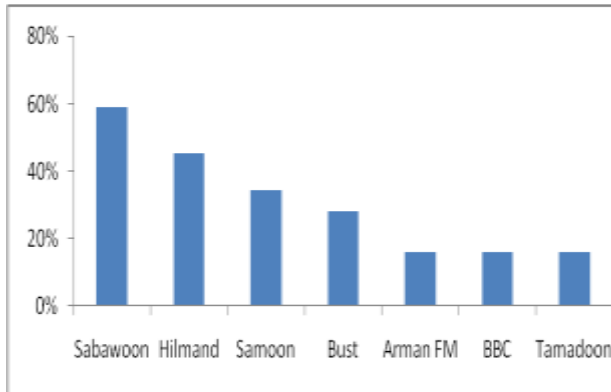
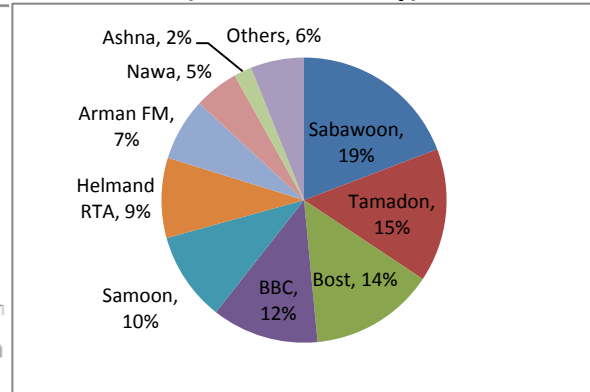


Figure 9: Most listened to radio stations (audience survey)



Television

The self-declared preferred TV station among Lashkar Gah interviewees is national Tolo, mentioned by 77% of respondents. This is somewhat surprising, because Tolo broadcasts mainly in Dari, whereas 79% of interviewees are native Pashto speakers. However, most interviewees understand Dari well: 59% declared that they can read and write it, and altogether 76% of interviewees understand it.

Lemar comes second (59%) and, as is often the case in the south, is far preferred to Shamshad (9%) (the other Pashto channel), because it is closer to the local language. Helmand RTA, the only local TV station in Helmand, is in third position (46%).

In terms of audience share, however, Ariana and Lemar come in first position, ahead of Tolo. Shamshad has a negligible audience share in the province.

Figure 10: Preferred TV channels (3 choices)

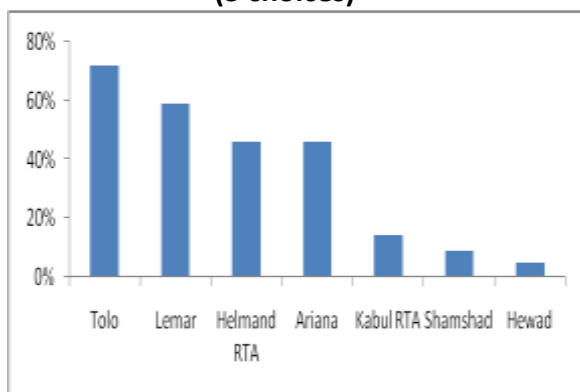
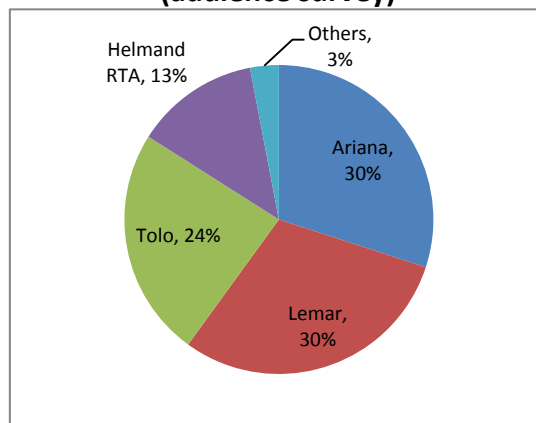


Figure 11: Most watched TV channels (audience survey)



Printed press

Three newspapers have the same level of popularity among Lashkar Gah interviewees: Helmand News (distributed for free), Tolo-e-Afghan, and Islami Diwa, each mentioned by 31% of respondents. Sada-e-Azadi (19%) and Poya (14%) are also relatively popular.

3.2.2 Programs

On TV, besides the news, entertainment content is widely appreciated, in the form of music shows and dramas. This is confirmed by the large audience share given to serials, game shows, and music.

Figure 12: Preferred TV programs (3 choices)

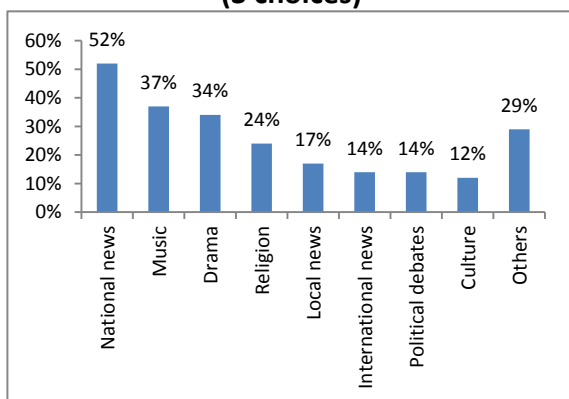
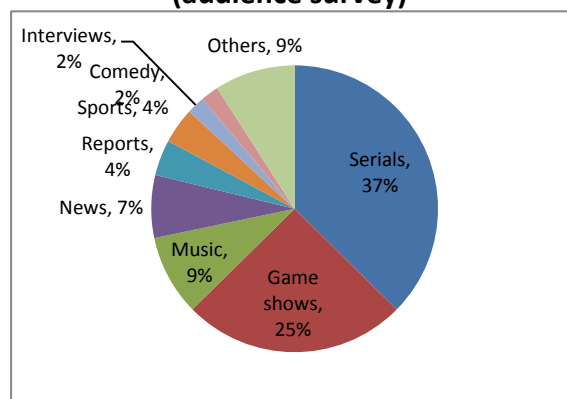


Figure 13: Most watched program type (audience survey)²

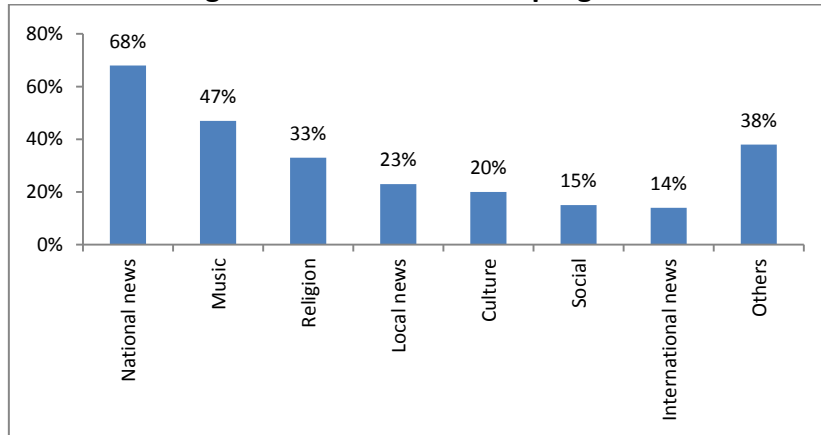


Families have started postponing their lunch and dinner so as not to miss such programming. The most popular dramas broadcast on television include *Toolsie* (Tolo) and *Kum Kum* (Ariana), both Indian and translated into Dari, and the Pashto drama *Mehin/Ismail Shahed* (Shamshad). Censorship is accepted when such viewing is considered culturally insensitive (e.g. inappropriate actress clothing, nudity, etc.) and changing channel is common in these circumstances.

² Note that audience share by program category is calculated only for the seven most popular national TV channels, and is computed based on the duration for which each show was watched in the province during the period of the audience survey: these figures should therefore be taken with caution.

On the radio, preferred programs are national news (mentioned by 68% of interviewees), followed by music, religious programs, and local news (23%).

Figure 14: Preferred radio programs



The qualitative research confirms this, and also indicates a keen interest in educational programs. News is listened to mainly in the evening (7-10pm) on Helmand RTA and Azadi.

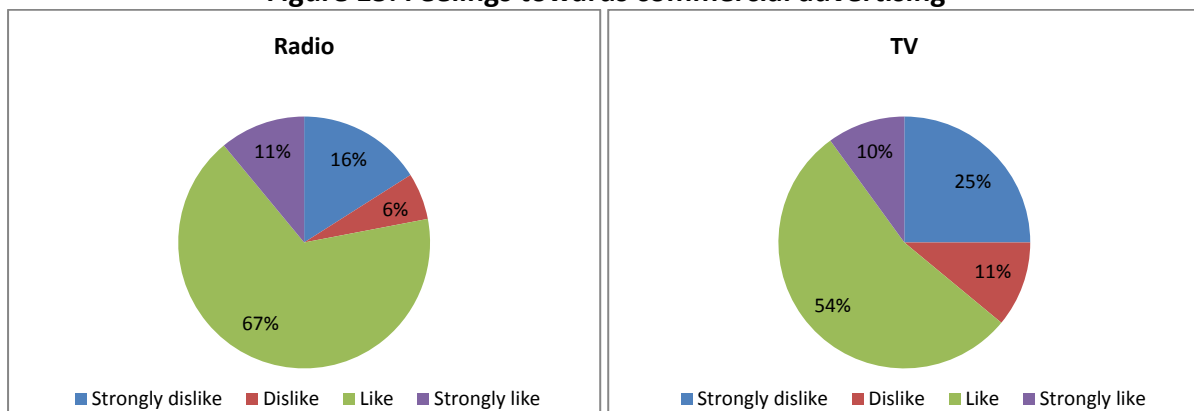
Community leaders in the district indicated that they valued programs about reconstruction and development, peace, economy, and agriculture, as well as social programs. In general, they felt that there is a large variety of media options in the district, that all are competing to have the best programs, and that each program has its own audience.

The fieldwork suggested that most people would enjoy an even greater amount of educational and religion programs, on both radio and TV, but that obituaries broadcast on RTA after the news bulletin are rather disliked. The only programs regularly mentioned as being of lesser interest were political debates (34% of interviewees) and women’s programs (24% – note that women were not included in this sample).

3.2.3 Advertising

Respondents in Lashkar Gah mostly liked advertising, both on the radio and TV.

Figure 15: Feelings towards commercial advertising



Interviewees considered adverts somewhat useful on both radio and TV, and most felt that there was about the right amount of advertising: 14% felt that there were too many adverts

on the radio and 8% felt this was the case on the TV. The most remembered are for banks, telecom operators, local companies, and airlines, on both media types.

3.2.4 Preferred personalities

Across all districts, when asked about preferred personalities in the media, most respondents mention prominent political figures, such as President Karzai. A few mention the local governor or former governor. Beyond key political leaders, they name singers, poets, local elders, and *mullahs*, although none of these are prominent figures in the media. This is possibly because the concept of famous anchors and journalists, or influential non-political characters, is still undeveloped. More detailed research based on the analysis of specific programs would be required to dig into this subject.

In Lashkar Gah, President Karzai was mentioned by 68% of interviewees, followed by Gol Agha Sherzai (governor of Nangarhar) and Ramazan Bashar Doost (MP), both mentioned by 7% of respondents. One or two respondents identified Esmatullah Khan, Gulab Mangal, Abdullah Abdullah, Mohammad Elias Dahi (a journalist at Azadi), and Stanegze (a local journalist) as preferred personalities.

3.3 Perceptions and impact

3.3.1 Comprehension

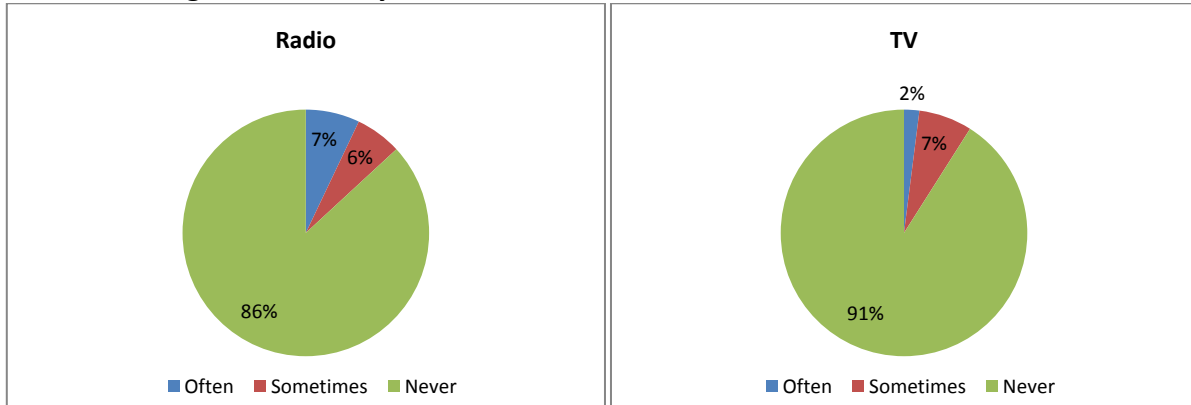
Only a small portion of interviewees mentioned problems understanding some programs on the radio (6%) or TV (9%). Programs considered more challenging are cultural programs and political debates, as well as news. The main issue is usually difficult language or terminology. TV is generally considered easier to understand than radio, given that it has images too.

For some media, the problem sometimes stems from pronunciation issues. Helmand RTA appears to be the most widely understood station, owing to the high degree of similarity between journalists' and audience members' accents.

3.3.2 Participation

A sizeable portion of respondents declared having contacted and interacted with the media they use, slightly fewer for TV stations (8%) than for radio stations (13%). Interaction is essentially conducted by phone, to request songs (75% of people for radio, 40% for TV) and sometimes to ask questions. The most contacted radio stations are local ones: Bost, Samoon, Sabawoon, and Helmand RTA, although some interviewees claimed they had contacted Arman FM and Azadi. The most contacted TV channel is Ariana.

Figure 16: Have you ever contacted radio stations or TV channels?



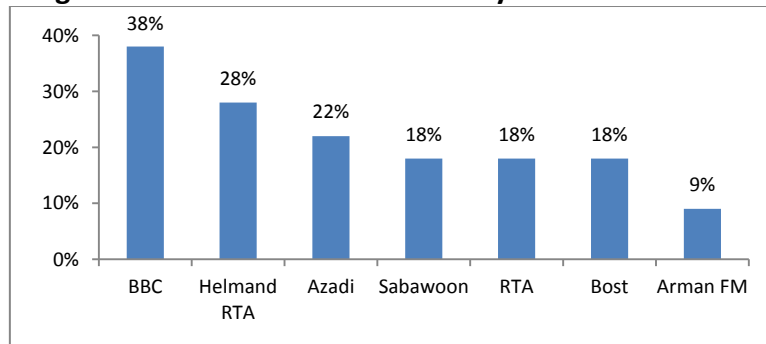
Most people enjoy interactive programming such as poetry readings on the radio, although very busy lines may deter audience engagement. Literate segments of the population participate, by means of calling in. Household members who do not own a mobile use the phone of another family member.

The sampled population preferred talking about sensitive topics with the media than with the government.

3.3.3 Trust

Stations that are the most trusted are the most prominent local radio stations: Helmand RTA, Sabawoon, and Bost, as well as well-represented national (or international) stations such as the BBC, Azadi, and Arman FM.

Figure 16: Which radio stations do you trust the most?



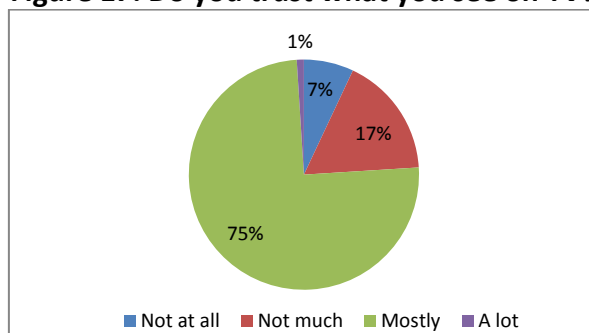
This should be qualified: people do not *always* trust government stations (such as Helmand RTA) (nor, for that matter, military or insurgent media outlets). Although people may appreciate their programs (e.g. music), such stations are not always considered trustworthy where news is concerned. Casualty reporting is often seen as particularly biased.

When asked whether media should openly discuss problems affecting the government, 36% of respondents strongly agreed. This does not seem to reflect common practice across the sector, however. *“Some media outlets forget Islamic rules and culture and think they are living in a foreign country, not in Afghanistan”* (Baghrey magazine manager).

Furthermore, prior to publishing a piece of work, journalists covering district security issues, for instance, must receive authorization from both the provincial police commander and

insurgent representatives. The interviewer saw pressure from the latter first-hand when conducting an interview with a journalist from Azadi. A small group of insurgents paid a visit to the outlet to complain about the supposedly limited coverage the outlet had given them.

Figure 17: Do you trust what you see on TV?



3.3.4 Perceptions of the local media

The most listened to local radio station (Helmand RTA) seems to have a reputation for very good quality. Some people expressed concerns about the quality of Bost, Sabawoon, and Samoon, but the numbers were too small to be significant. Mostly, the primary users of a radio station are relatively happy with its quality.

Table 1: What is the quality of the local radio station you listen to the most?

	Not very good	Could be better	Good	Very good	#
Helmand RTA	3%	6%	25%	67%	36
Bost	16%	5%	16%	63%	19
Sabawoon	12%	39%	29%	59%	17

Local radio stations are considered beneficial to the community, because they bring more local content, be it local news (57% of respondents) or services such as public announcements and local adverts (50%). A total of 56% of respondents think that local radio brings more independent information.

Perceived quality of a medium does not necessarily result in blind acceptance of the content it broadcasts: government and military outlets are generally perceived as being openly political, and private outlets are considered to be exposed to pressure for censorship.

3.3.5 Circulation and impact

It is generally agreed that the media contributes positively to informing the population, especially with respect to education, health (e.g. vaccinations), entertainment, and religion. As such, the media, and particularly the local media, is considered to be bringing positive changes to the community. A total of 96% of respondents felt that the radio often brings new ideas (49% sometimes), and nearly all of these respondents felt that these new ideas were good. Most declared that TV often makes them consider things differently.

Figure 18: Does local radio have an impact on your community?

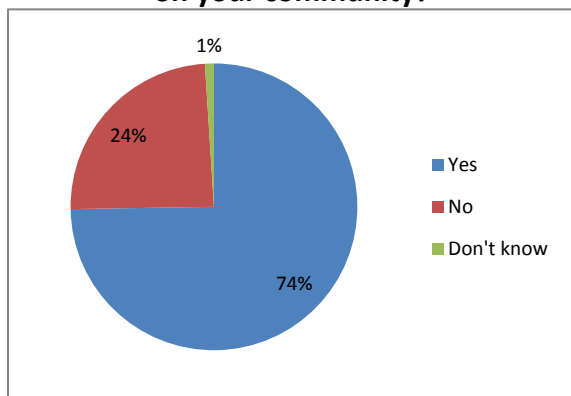
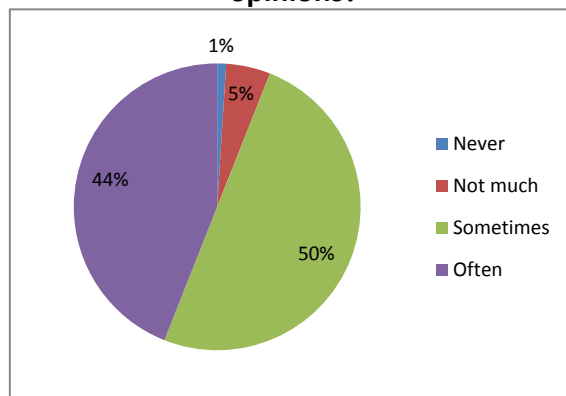


Figure 19: Can TV make you change your opinions?



Many of the topics broadcast on radio and TV are discussed with family and friends. TV programs (especially Indian dramas) are usually discussed widely. Transfer of videos between mobiles happens occasionally, with youth sharing songs and films mainly through Bluetooth.

3.3.6 Development project communication and educational campaigns

Abdullah Mubin (head of the high school for boys in Lashkar Gah) launched a one-day live radio program on Helmand RTA in early 2010. This targeted families with children and dealt with the importance of education.

Helmand RTA (radio and TV) has broadcast announcements to deter poppy cultivation.

A large majority of the surveyed population from Lashkar Gah remembers campaigns promoting vaccinations and elections, and those opposing poppy cultivation (mostly broadcast on Helmand RTA).

4 Conclusions and areas of opportunities

“Now we have some freedom of expression, and this is still improving”

“To have a greater impact, media should inform the government and the UN about people’s problems in the area; they should create programs that focus on priorities to address in development, economy, security, and social projects”

“The media must motivate and mobilize households to support the education of their children”

(Qualitative interviews with community leaders, Lashkar Gah district)

Lashkar Gah has a lively media landscape, with a set of private and state-run media that complements the international media, and a vibrant journalism community. The district’s exposure to 10 radio stations (6 of which are local) makes this city not dissimilar to other large ones in Afghanistan, such as Khost (which features 12 radio stations, 9 of which are local). There is a relatively high concentration in terms of outlet ownership, with three outlets owned by businessman Mr. Mirwais Patsoon (Baghrey magazine, Sabawoon radio and Muska radio).

All national radio stations have generally good reception in the district, as they use transmitters with a broadcast radius of over 35km in an area that is 20x40km and flat. Antennas are all based in Lashkar Gah city, with the exception of that of Tamadon (which has its antenna in Nad Ali district). Samoon’s antenna is near Bush Bazaar in Lashkar Gah city. Killid is the only radio station that has poor reception, as its antenna is based in Kandahar. It is likely that most communities are reached by smaller FM transmitters, except those further east (towards Maywand district of Kandahar province).

The interviewer was not aware of any repeaters in the district. In fact, a number of districts in Helmand province require antennas urgently (Garmser, Nad Ali, Kajaki, Musa Qala, Sangin, Nawzad, Washer, and Baghran). These are districts under insurgent control where antennas are not allowed, thus there is no local media coverage, only national.

Some government support has supposedly been earmarked to increase coverage of one outlet (Bost). In addition, for most private stations, commercial advertising seems to have an increasingly important role to play (generating an average \$1,000-2,000 a month).

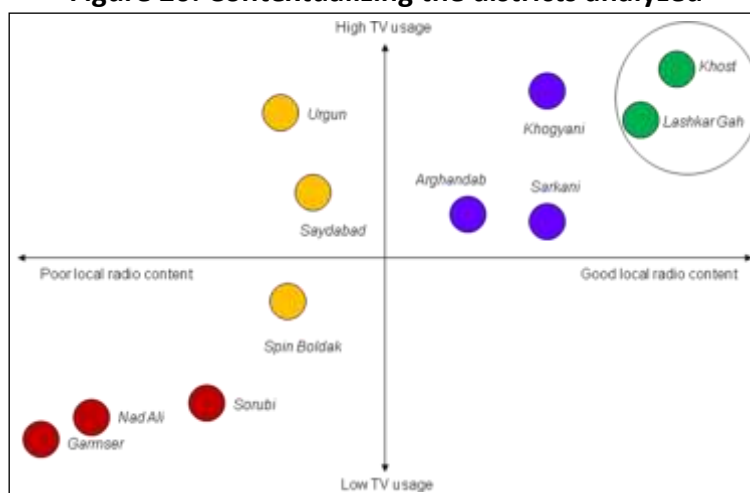
Print outlets are generally run by cultural associations (e.g. Helah, Eela, Shamla, Zuwanan, Nan Afghanistan), and these are critical to their sustainability. Besides Baghrey magazine, which relies to some extent on commercial advertising, owners generally fund printing costs (e.g. Shamla, Nan Afghanistan) or support distribution through their own informal network of acquaintances (Safaar), thus freeing the outlet from a part of their cost burden (some publications are also sold for free, such as Bost and Helah).

Both quantitative and qualitative research suggest that a variety of media and content is available, and that media users have developed relatively sophisticated patterns, as observed in larger Afghan cities a few years ago. With quite good access to electricity, TV is now a well-established medium, and is bringing families together in the evening; radio maintains a large audience during the day. Entertainment programs, including Indian soaps,

have become popular and do not seem to trigger a negative reaction, despite a certain level of conservatism in the region.

Figure 21, which classifies the districts analyzed for this study into four groups on the basis of TV usage and quality of local radio content, illustrates Lashkar Gah's positioning in relation to the other districts.

Figure 20: Contextualizing the districts analyzed



In such a landscape, it is possible to identify a few areas of opportunity. Some outlets (Bost radio, Baghrey magazine) identified training programs and equipment support as needs. It might be possible also to put more emphasis on educational and religious programs, together with programs to accompany the reconstruction of the region: voicing peoples' needs (and reporting these needs to the UN and NGOs), informing them about development, motivating them to educate their children and build a better future, etc.

Specific support could be provided to the local journalists' association that meets on a regular basis at the Press Office for Culture and Information in Lashkar Gah city. Many journalists complain about security constraints in their work, and such a committee could be a useful place to address freedom of expression issues and support journalists who are threatened.