



# Afghan Media in 2010

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## Priority District Report Nad Ali (Helmand)

**October 13, 2010**

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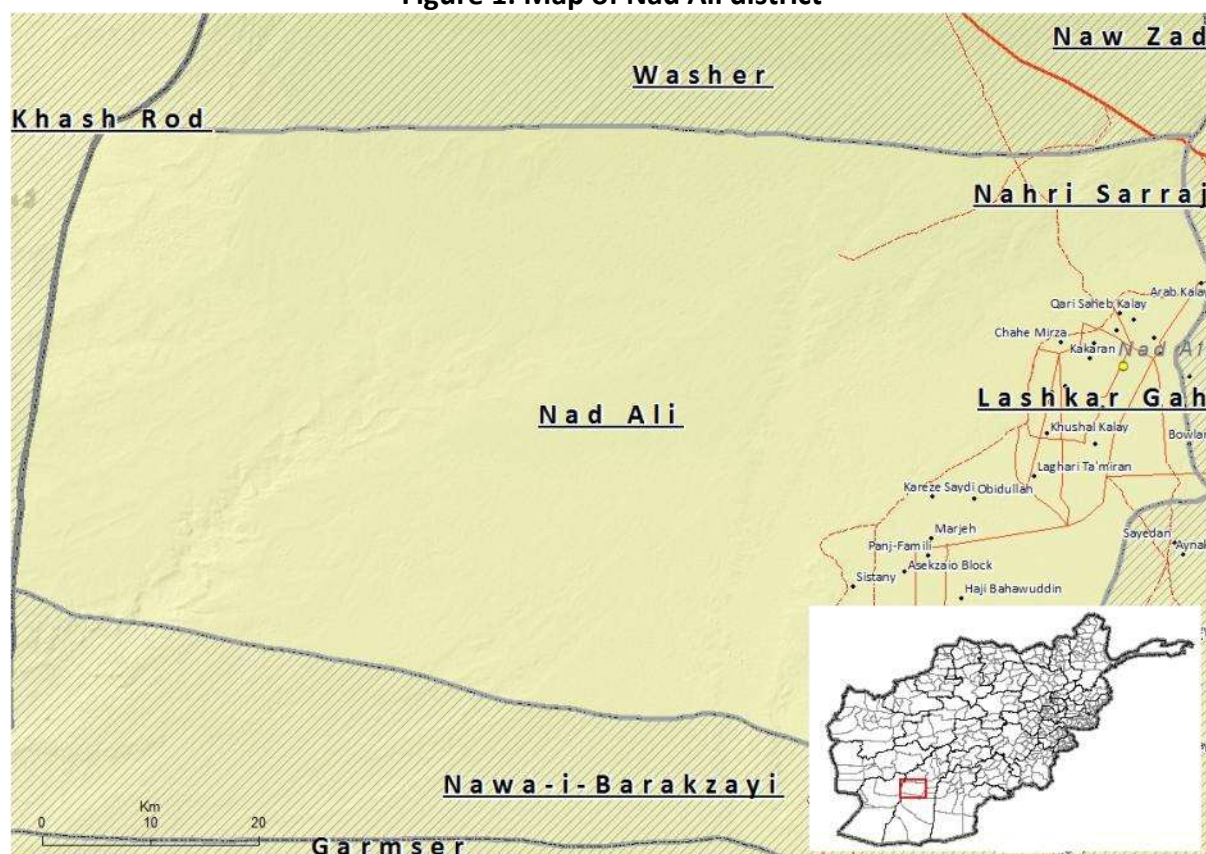
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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 District profile

Nad Ali is located in the center of Helmand province. It borders Washer district to the north, Nahri Sarraj to the east, Nawa to the south, and Khash Rod and Charkhansur (Nimroz province) to the west. It has a population of approximately 111,000, spread across more than 70 villages. A total of 98% are Pashto and a small minority is made up of Dari-speaking Hazara.

Figure 1: Map of Nad Ali district



There are 12 secondary schools (Classes 1 to 9), 3 high schools, and 3 primary schools. There are roughly 50 teachers for about 1,600-1,800 students. Girls' education is limited, with only one female high school, in Sayed Abad, which currently enrolls approximately 200 girls (mostly Hazara). Poor security has significantly hampered girls' enrollment, which was at 1,200 before the Taliban regime. A total of 64% of the sample studied was illiterate.

The district's economy is largely agricultural.

Security is a major issue. There was widespread agreement among interviewed community leaders that the situation in Nad Ali is very bad. Unlike in some other priority districts, where there is notable denial, respondents stated openly that insurgents were present in most parts of the district.

There is no public electricity supply in Nad Ali district. Some households have private generators, a few use batteries for light, and the rest of the population relies on oil lamps (kerosene, diesel, and gas).

Mobile use came in four years ago but was interrupted for a year and a half, when Nad Ali was under Taliban control. It returned only at the beginning of 2010. Roshan and AWCC theoretically cover the district, but the signal is of poor quality, especially in rural areas in the north. Furthermore, insurgents periodically cut the connection or warn the inhabitants against using their phones.

## 1.2 Methodology

Fieldwork took place in April 2010 and covered the following areas: Loi Bagh (urban, including the bazaar, 80km and a 2.5-3-hour drive from Garmser), Khushal Kali (peri-urban, 5km west of the bazaar), Zargon Kali (peri-urban, 5-6km north of the bazaar), Sayed Abad (rural, 8km east of the bazaar), and Chahi Anjeer (rural, 12km east of the bazaar).

Unlike other priority districts included in this study, 55 close-ended interviews only were conducted in Nad Ali, owing to the absence of a phone service at the time of the study and also to security issues (see below). Audience data collection findings from 435 phone interviews with 61 unique media users in Helmand province are also reported in the audience section.

Additionally, a total of 11 key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with the following community leaders: tribal chiefs in Loi Bagh, Sayed Abad, and Zargon; a *mullah* in Loi Bagh; two *maliks* (village chiefs) in Zargon; a *shura* (council) member in Zargon; a former *mujahed* commander in Chahi Anjeer; a high school dean in the bazaar; a security manager in a government office; and the head of education in the district office.

The interviewer was forced to change one of the villages he had initially selected for the survey because he did not obtain permission from the authorities. In some rural areas the interviewer took precautionary measures, such as hiding questionnaires under the driver's seat.

Around 40 people refused to take part in the survey.

## 2 Media landscape

With only one local radio station in Nad Ali, broadcasts from Lashkar Gah dominate the media landscape. The district is within range of four TV channels and four radio stations.

There are five video shops in the bazaar selling DVDs (movies) and CDs brought from Lashkar Gah. Although the shops sell DVDs and CDs openly, clients tend to hide their purchases. There are six *chaikhana* (tea shops), two of which have TV sets showing music videos and Indian movies during the day. Around five satellite antennas were observed, mainly on government offices.

Approximately 10 Public Call Offices (PCOs) are functioning, with 6-7 mobile phones in each.

### 2.1 Media outlets

#### 2.1.1 Television

There is no local TV station in Nad Ali. Through terrestrial antennas, the following channels are available (sometimes with poor signal quality):

| Name        | Scope      | Ownership    | Antenna loc. | Broadcast radius |
|-------------|------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|
| Helmand RTA | Provincial | Governmental | Lashkar Gah  | 45 km            |
| Ariana      | National   | Private      | Lashkar Gah  | 35-75km          |
| Lemar       | National   | Private      | Lashkar Gah  | 50km             |
| Tolo        | National   | Private      | Lashkar Gah  | 50km             |

There is no cable television network.

#### 2.1.2 Radio

Besides the shortwave radio stations available throughout Afghanistan, there is one local radio station in the district, plus two provincial stations and one national station.

| Name        | Scope      | Ownership      | Frequency | Antenna location | Broadcast radius |
|-------------|------------|----------------|-----------|------------------|------------------|
| Tamadon     | Local      | Military (PRT) | -         | PRT compound     | -                |
| Sabawoon    | Provincial | Private        | 88 FM     | Lashkar Gah      | 35km             |
| Helmand RTA | Provincial | Government     | 95 FM     | Lashkar Gah      | 45km             |
| Arman FM    | National   | Private        | 98.1 FM   | Lashkar Gah      | -                |

Tamadon, which is generally referred to as “the military radio” or “Nad Ali Radio,” started its service six months ago and broadcasts from the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) compound close to the district office. It airs 16 hours a day, from 8-12am. Programming includes music (90% of programming) and local news (at 8pm every day). Other noteworthy programs are *Delikunu Zuab* (letters and song requests, from 8am-12pm, three to four times a week), reports from schools (with students and teachers, two to three times a month), and speeches by district officials (district governor, chief of police, etc., two to three times a week). Foreign content is limited to some music (5%, mainly Indian). The political leaning of Tamadon radio is clear in its regular broadcasting of government speeches.

Please refer to the Lashkar Gah report for further details on provincial stations.

### **2.1.3 Newspapers**

There are no local newspapers or magazines in Nad Ali, nor is any provincial printed press distributed. Three out of eleven community leaders interviewed mentioned that they occasionally read the press when they travel to Lashkar Gah. One mentioned the occasional availability of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) magazine Sada-e-Azadi.

## **2.2 New media**

### **2.2.1 Mobile media**

No usage of mobile media was reported in Nad Ali, nor any sale or exchange of ringtones or videos. These are more likely to occur when Nad Ali residents visit Lashkar Gah or other large cities.

### **2.2.2 Internet**

No internet connection is available in Nad Ali. No District Communication Network (DCN) access point seems to have been installed in the district center.

## **2.3 Media and information actors**

### **2.3.1 Government**

No representative of the government Bakhtar News Agency (BNA) or of the Ministry of Information and Culture (MoIC) was reported in Nad Ali.

### **2.3.2 Outlet managers and journalists**

Two journalists are working in Nad Ali district (for Tamadon radio).

All Tamadon programming is controlled by the manager, and the director checks every report in advance. Radio stations perceived as being independent (Sabawoon and Samoon) are less exposed to censorship, although they also have editorial boards.

When asked about topics that are sensitive for the media, community leaders mentioned human rights and specifically women's rights. Most support such sensitivity, since in their view women should not have full access to the media.

### **2.3.3 Media NGOs**

There are no media-related non-governmental organizations (NGO) or other organizations in the district, and there was no information on the provision of journalism training.

### **2.3.4 Traditional information sources**

As often is the case in rural Afghanistan, mosques are gathering points where people can exchange information. Mosques use loudspeakers for calls to prayer and Friday sermons. Government offices in the district center use them for public announcements (e.g. vaccination campaigns).

### 2.3.5 Insurgents

Communication from insurgents often takes the form of *shabnama* (“night letters”), generally distributed a couple of times a month. Sending messages indirectly is also very common. SMS and videos are rarely used as means to approach the local population. Militants sometimes use mobile phones to communicate with community leaders.

### 2.3.6 Military

Both the foreign and the national military meet with *shura* members regularly, generally once a week. On other occasions, such as when a village receives *shabnama*, the military may visit the village and gather the local population together to follow up on the event.

### 2.3.7 Others

Nad Ali district was a lively district until it was affected during the war. Major changes that the development community has fostered in the past five years include: increased agricultural yields through International Relief and Development (IRD) distribution of improved seeds and fertilizers; paved roads, which have improved access to the bazaar; new offices for the police and district governor (PRT); and vaccination programs led by the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

### 3 Audience

The following is a description of the audience in Nad Ali, based on 55 close-ended interviews (please refer to Section 1.2 for an explanation of this figure) and 11 open-ended KIIs. Some parts of the statistical analysis have been simplified owing to the small sample size.

Audience data for Helmand province overall were also collected, by means of 435 phone interviews with 61 unique media users. Findings are reported in this section.

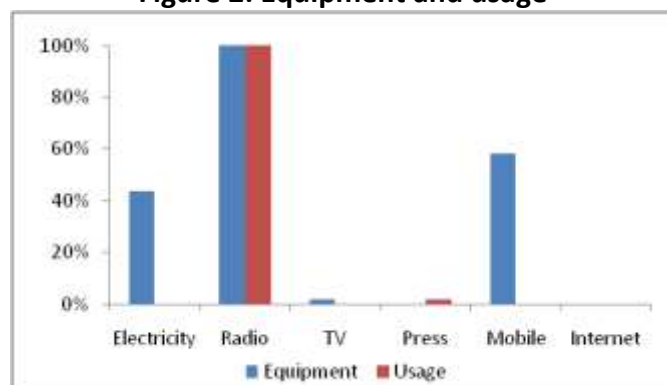
#### 3.1 Equipment and usage

##### 3.1.1 Household equipment

Unsurprisingly, radio equipment and usage are very high. A basic battery radio at the bazaar costs \$2. No crank or solar radios were reported.

There is a rather high rate of mobile ownership. Problematic network coverage means it is most likely that people own mobile phones but use them in parts of the district that enjoy reasonable coverage or when travelling to the provincial center, Lashkar Gah.

**Figure 2: Equipment and usage**



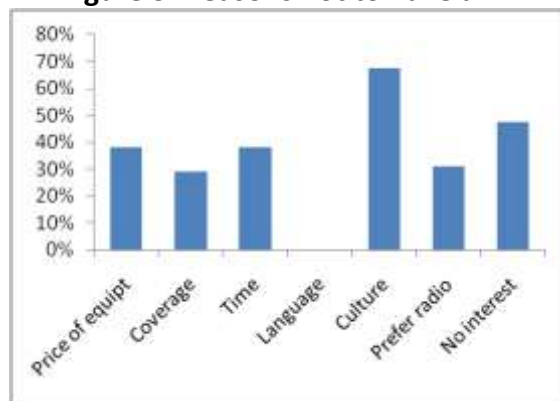
Low printed press readership is explained by the high illiteracy rate found in the sample and by low education levels (55% were uneducated).

The very low TV equipment rate was confirmed by direct observation in the district center and discussion with key informants: apparently, there are about 20 TV sets in the entire district. Of these, around 16 are in households that watch TV using a dish antenna and 4 are in households that use a terrestrial antenna. Only 2 of the 11 community leaders interviewed watch television regularly, and 3 do so occasionally, when travelling out of the district. Probability-wise, this is consistent with the quantitative data shown in Figure 2.

Lack of electricity does not seem to be the main factor limiting TV penetration: although there is no city power, 44% of the sample own a generator or solar panels. Neither coverage nor price appeared as an obstacle to TV ownership and usage in the quantitative research (Figure 3). However, qualitative observation pointed to harsh economic conditions (partly because of the destruction and displacement that recent military operations have caused) and poor signal quality as disincentives.



**Figure 3: Reasons not to have a TV**



The main reason given for not having a TV set was cultural opposition: 67% of interviewees felt TV was not suitable to the local culture and religion. Probably because of this, interviewees also showed a lack of interest in TV (47%). The qualitative research and debriefing of the interviewer both confirmed these factors.

### 3.1.2 Sources of information and media usage

Taking into account the media usage patterns described above, radio is the dominant source of information for all but one topic. Cultural conservativeness (represented by cultural issues with regard to using TV) and low education levels mean that people turn to *mullahs* and mosques when it comes to religious matters.

**Table 1: What is the most-used source of information?**

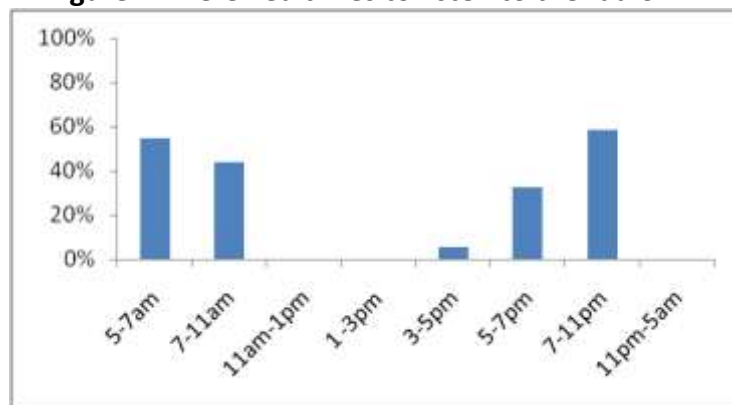
|                    | Family, friends | Mullah, mosque | Radio | TV | Shopkeepers/ bazaar | Shura | Khan, malik, commander | Taxi drivers | Books | #  |
|--------------------|-----------------|----------------|-------|----|---------------------|-------|------------------------|--------------|-------|----|
| Politics           | 0%              | 0%             | 100%  | 0% | 0%                  | 0%    | 0%                     | 0%           | 0%    | 13 |
| Religion           | 0%              | 100%           | 0%    | 0% | 0%                  | 0%    | 0%                     | 0%           | 0%    | 55 |
| Local news         | 0%              | 2%             | 96%   | 0% | 0%                  | 0%    | 0%                     | 2%           | 0%    | 54 |
| National news      | 0%              | 0%             | 100%  | 0% | 0%                  | 0%    | 0%                     | 0%           | 0%    | 52 |
| International news | 0%              | 0%             | 100%  | 0% | 0%                  | 0%    | 0%                     | 0%           | 0%    | 3  |
| Movies & songs     | 0%              | 0%             | 100%  | 0% | 0%                  | 0%    | 0%                     | 0%           | 0%    | 3  |

The added value of the media lies in its audience reach compared with traditional sources, which can inform only a limited segment of the population. Furthermore, media can rely on reporters to collect information and data, so the general perception is that it tends to be more trustworthy, especially when it comes to reporting on numbers of casualties.

### 3.1.3 Usage patterns

As radio is the only available medium in the district, one might expect it to be listened to throughout the day. Nevertheless, in line with other places, there are two distinctive peaks. Morning prime time (5-7am) gathers 55% of listeners (more than any other districts surveyed). The evening peak (7-11pm) gathers 58%, which is more in line with other districts.

**Figure 4: Preferred times to listen to the radio**



## 3.2 Preferences

### 3.2.1 Outlets

#### Radio

The BBC, because of its high-quality Pashto service, comes first in terms of preference, far ahead of other stations in Nad Ali. Azadi follows, and then come the state-run Helmand RTA (Radio Television Afghanistan), Sabawoon, and Ashna. Lower down are three stations whose signal does not reach the district center well but which can be listened to when travelling to Lashkar Gah.

It is striking to notice that the only local radio station in the district, Tamadon, has virtually no listenership (7%) – if we can judge by expressed preferences. Its military character and poor content (almost only music), in a conservative environment subject to insurgent pressure, are the main factors explaining this.

**Figure 5: Preferred radio stations (3 choices)**

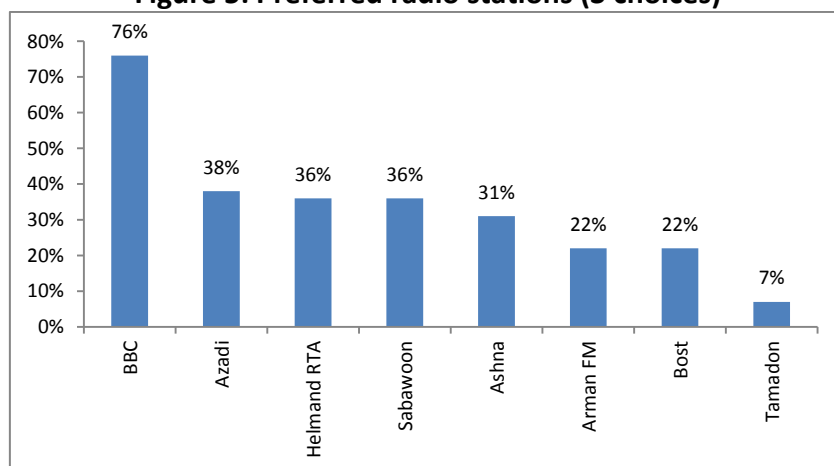
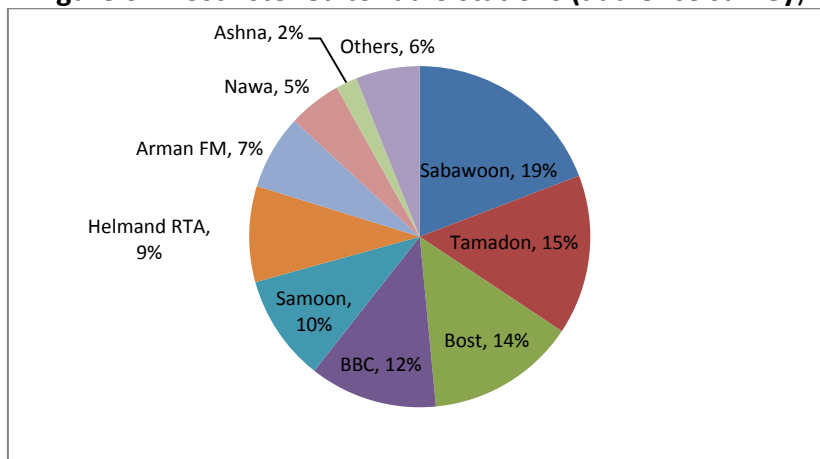


Figure 6 shows audience share for radio stations in Helmand province (not specifically for Nad Ali district). Sabawoon takes the largest audience share (19%), followed by Tamadon (15%), Bost (14%), and the BBC (12%).

**Figure 6: Most listened to radio stations (audience survey)**



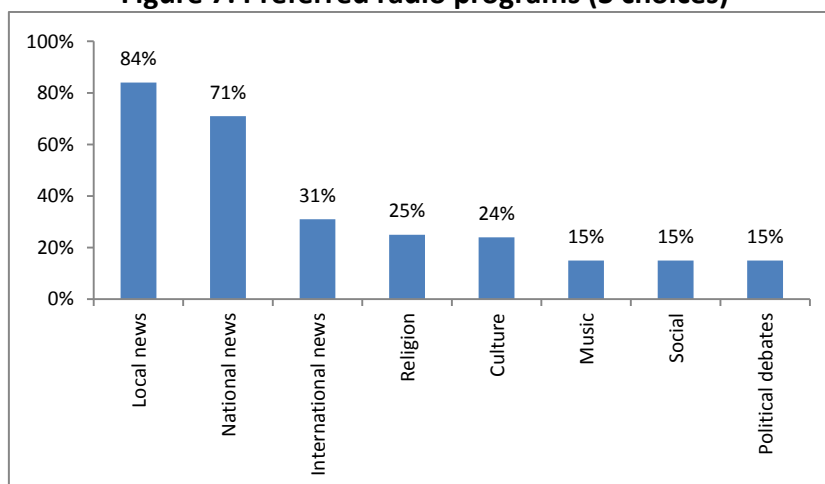
### 3.2.2 Programs

Nad Ali respondents’ preference for local news (84%) is comparable with that of neighboring Garmser district. The fourth-most sought after radio content is religion (25%) which, given the 100% rate of respondents turning to *mullahs* for religious matters, suggests a lack of religious programs on the radio.

The qualitative research showed that residents are particularly keen on hearing more about religion (e.g. information on dowries, translation of the Quran, human rights according to Islam), education (teaching mathematics, physics, etc.), and counternarcotics.

Respondents have strong opinions on which programs should be limited. Unlike in other locations, 73% would be happy to reduce the amount of drama on the radio, 62% would like to limit music (elders tend to complain about the quantity of music broadcast) and political debates, and 40% international news. In this, Nad Ali’s sample is very similar to Garmser’s.

**Figure 7: Preferred radio programs (3 choices)**

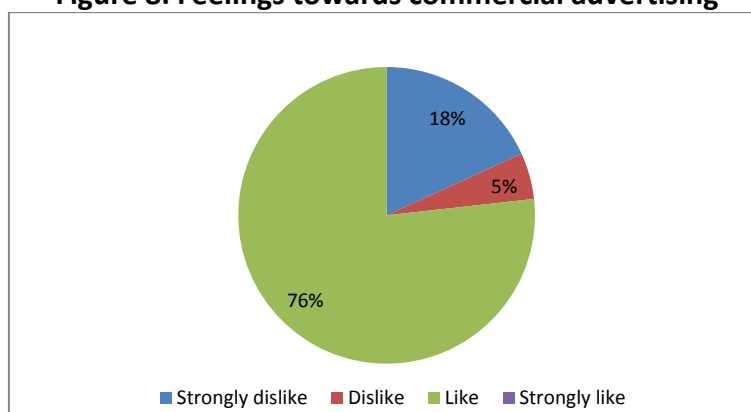


According to the qualitative research, the most popular programs include Tamadon local news, BBC international news, and the BBC drama *Nawi Kor, Nawi Zhound* (“New Home, New Life”). The local community is generally supportive of censoring programs seen to be an affront to Afghan culture, such as those showing women without headscarves on TV.

### 3.2.3 Advertising

As is shown above, Nad Ali respondents tend to be conservative. Among all communities researched, theirs was one of the most hostile to commercial advertising: 23% dislike or strongly dislike this type of radio content and 71% found it only slightly useful – one of the most negative results across all districts researched.

**Figure 8: Feelings towards commercial advertising**



Nad Ali respondents remember bank adverts the most (37%). Universities and schools come second, which is encouraging, given the low education level in the district.

The qualitative research showed that local Tamadon radio does not broadcast commercial advertising but does broadcast occasional government announcements. Adverts on the radio recalled the most included those for Rolex Mobil Oil (lubricant for cars) and for private schools and clinics.

### 3.2.4 Personalities

Interviewees mentioned a reporter from Samoon radio, Mr. Barialai, and a presenter from Sabawoon radio, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Akmal (who calls people and asks them about their favorite songs), as important personalities. Abdulraman Saber and two parliamentary attorneys (Wali Jan Saber and Malim Mirwais) were also among the most-mentioned personalities.

## 3.3 Perceptions and impact

### 3.3.1 Comprehension

Nearly one-fifth (17%) of radio listeners have trouble understanding programs. The main difficulties relate to government announcements (67%) and political debates (56%), which is especially challenging from a civil society point of view. In addition (and this is a surprise), there are major issues understanding drama programs (56%). This may help explain why drama is the most disliked type of radio broadcasting (Section 3.2.2).

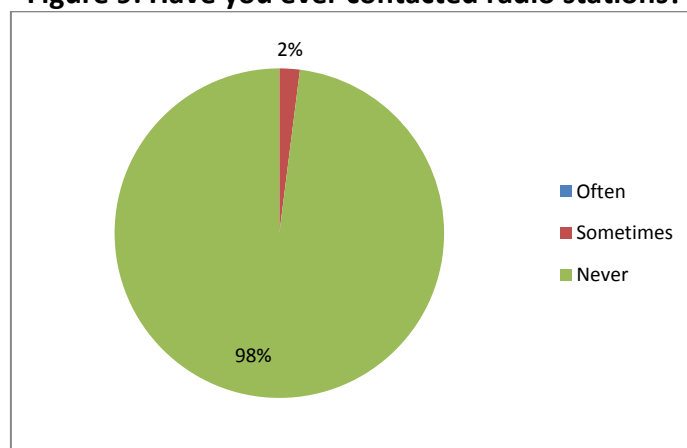
Language and pronunciation are not big issues; rather, the problem lies in difficult terminology (67% of the sample reported this as an issue).

### 3.3.2 Participation

The qualitative research showed that interactive radio programs include *Delikunu Zuab* on Tamadon (every morning 8-12am) and *Azmunga Zaehen* on Sabawoon (a quiz show, 9-11am twice a week). Mostly youth participate, through phone calls and sometimes letters. Older community leaders interviewed did not know much about interactive programs.

Nad Ali respondents are not eager to interact with the media: of 55 respondents, only 1 has ever contacted a radio station. Deficient phone coverage and the sensitivity involved in getting in touch with a military station, in the context of the heavy insurgent presence, are credible explanations for this low figure.

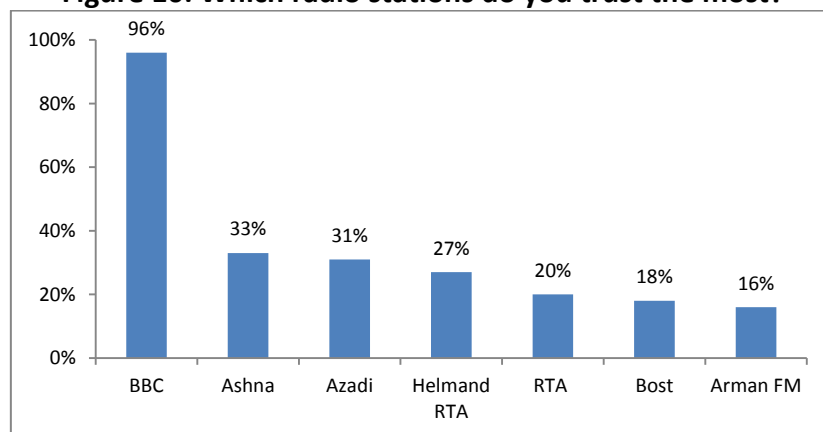
**Figure 9: Have you ever contacted radio stations?**



### 3.3.3 Trust

The most-trusted radio station is the BBC, which almost all respondents trusted. Well behind are the next three, Ashna, Azadi, and the government Helmand RTA. The respondents did not make much mention of the regional stations received in the district. This was confirmed by qualitative research findings: information broadcast by the military Tamadon radio is positively disbelieved, especially when it comes to the speeches of government officials, which are not seen to reflect reality.

**Figure 10: Which radio stations do you trust the most?**



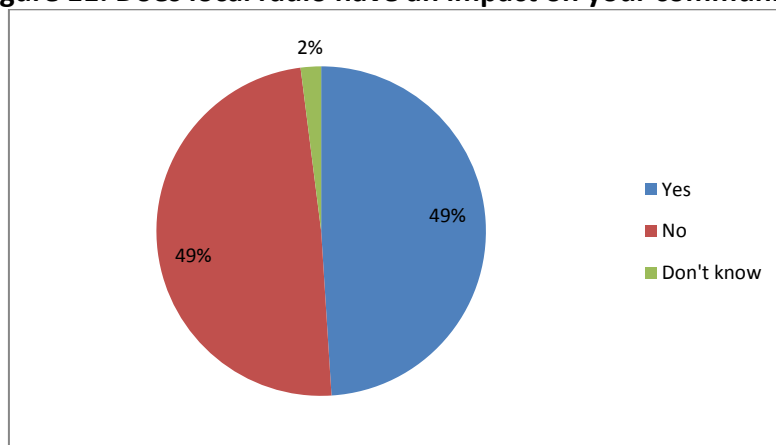
### 3.3.4 Perceptions of the local media

Interviewees consider Tamadon to be their local radio station, although some also mentioned Sabawoon (which broadcasts from Lashkar Gah) and Helmand RTA. Their quality level is overall perceived as satisfactory, but since Tamadon does not appear as one of the favorite stations (Section 3.2.1), the question may have been understood as referring to quality of coverage rather than quality of programming. Interviewees may also be unwilling to criticize the local military outlet openly.

### 3.3.5 Circulation and impact

Having no local radio station they can relate to, Nad Ali respondents are critical about the role of radio within their community. Only around half of them (49%) believe that the radio has any impact, although 96% said the radio brings new ideas. According to the qualitative research, content that is discussed within families includes that on HIV/AIDS, schooling, livelihoods, and elections.

**Figure 11: Does local radio have an impact on your community?**



According to community leaders, the media has a positive effect on the local population. The BBC's "New Home, New Life" and other programs (e.g. public health-related programs) seem to be the most influential (on HIV/AIDS awareness, for instance).

### 3.3.6 Development project communication and educational campaigns

Recent public information campaigns that interviewees remembered include those dealing with counternarcotics and elections (on Samoon, Sabawoon, and Helmand RTA radio stations; on Tolo and Ariana TV channels; and through government leaflets and billboards), polio vaccinations (Samoon and Sabawoon radio; billboards), educational enrollment, and agriculture (including distribution of improved seeds by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development).

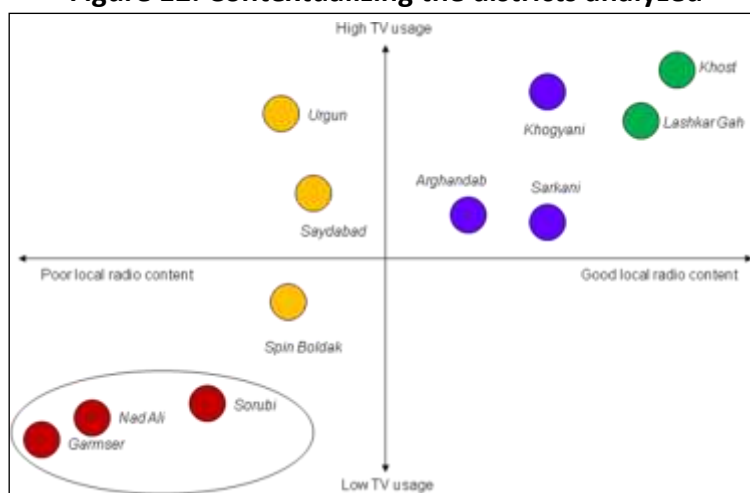
## 4 Conclusions and areas of opportunity

Nad Ali's media landscape is one of the poorest observed among the priority districts included in this study. The low reported media usage is explained by conservative attitudes and probably (although this exceeds the scope of the present study) pressure from insurgents, who have controlled the area for a year and a half. However, the district does have access to a few provincial and national radio and TV stations. Across the five villages surveyed, radio reception is generally good, whereas TV channels broadcasting from Lashkar Gah have weak transmission (except in the bazaar).

The district features virtually no production of local content and has almost no journalists. There is an unpopular local military station, and inhabitants turn mostly to provincial radio stations. Attitudes towards the media seem to be driven by a low level of education, which means a very limited reading culture and general conservatism in terms of taste and traditions (which does not seem to result in sympathy for the insurgents, however, as far as such a variable can be genuinely apprehended).

Figure 12, which classifies the districts analyzed for this study into four groups on the basis of TV usage and quality of local radio content, illustrates Nad Ali's positioning in relation to the other districts.

**Figure 12: Contextualizing the districts analyzed**



In such a setting, improving signal quality for TV broadcasts and mobile phone coverage through the installment of additional repeaters is a priority. The plain that lies 15km west of the bazaar is a good location for extra antennas.

The presence of strong socio-cultural barriers does not necessarily imply that the district's inhabitants would oppose new media content, if it were adapted to their wishes. Qualitative interviews showed strong support for religious and educational programs. This represents a key opportunity for further development of the district's media. An improved version of Educational Radio and Television (ERTV), the educational channel developed by the Ministry of Education, for example, with its serious and didactic style, might suit residents' needs (as well as those of other people living in similar media-deprived, rural, and conservative districts, such as Garmser). It would also be a partial remedy to the low education level.

As far as radio is concerned, a set of content-related interventions could increase popularity and trust in Tamadon radio, as suggested in similar districts (Garmser and Sorubi (Paktika province)). These might include a reduction in music programming and diversification of content, through either internal production or purchase (e.g. content bought from successful military radio stations).